



# BOMB ALLEY





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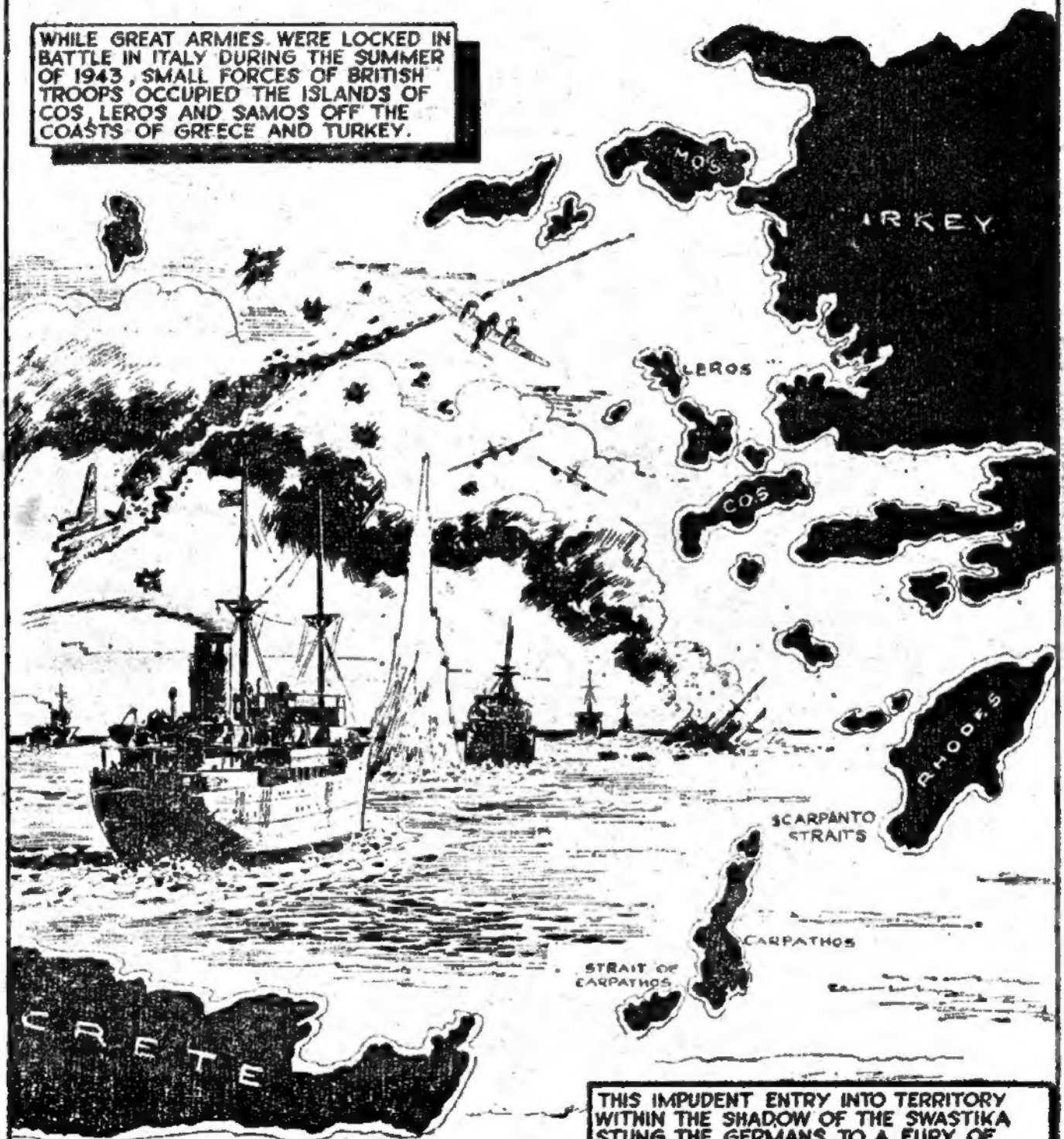
Operating three hundred miles within enemy territory, the Long Range Desert Group found that discipline and daring mixed well together, creating a force that could crack the enemy's toughest defences.

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ONE . . . ZERO !**

# BOMB ALLEY

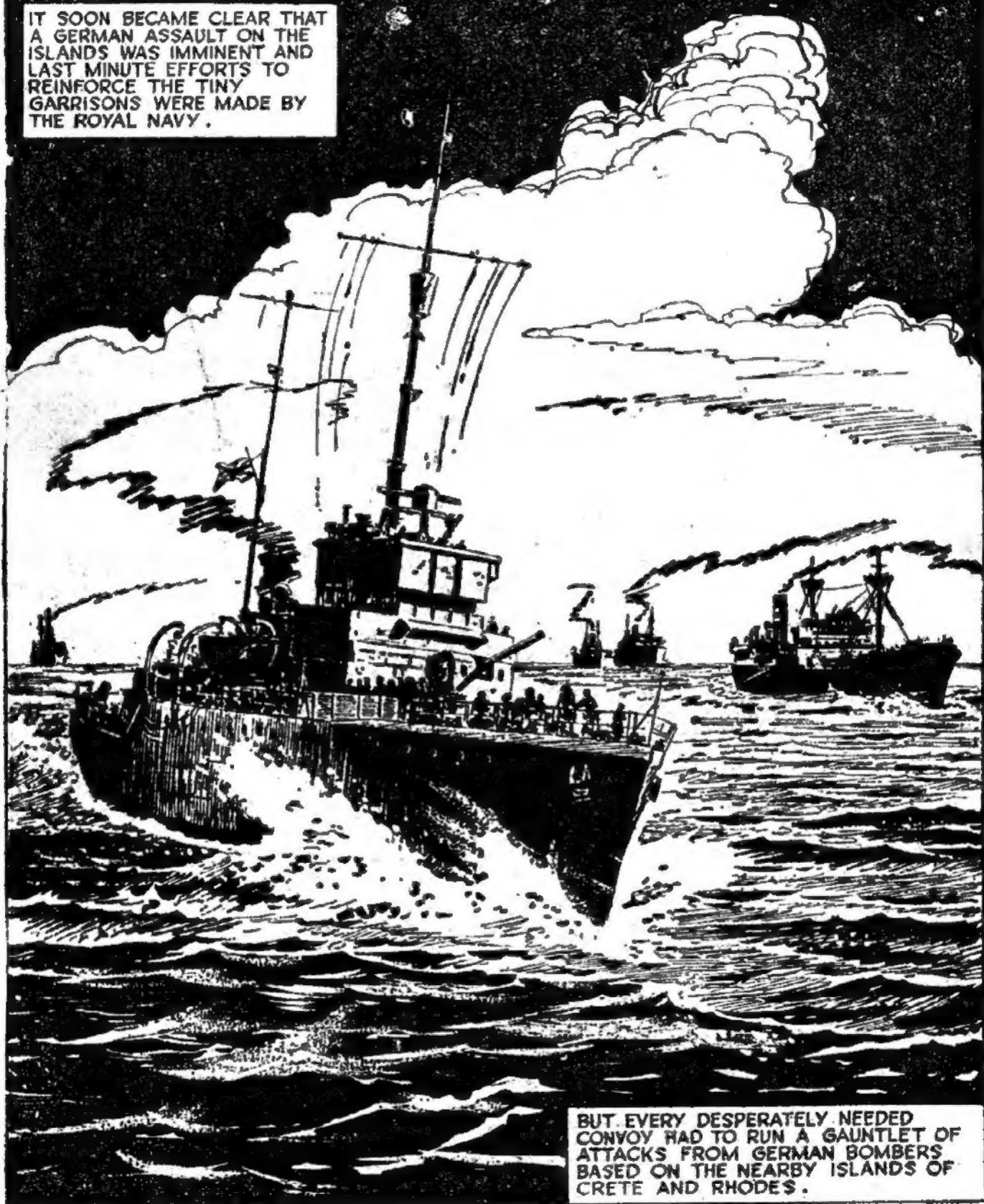
WHILE GREAT ARMIES WERE LOCKED IN BATTLE IN ITALY DURING THE SUMMER OF 1943, SMALL FORCES OF BRITISH TROOPS OCCUPIED THE ISLANDS OF COS, LEROS AND SAMOS OFF THE COASTS OF GREECE AND TURKEY.



THIS IMPUDENT ENTRY INTO TERRITORY WITHIN THE SHADOW OF THE SWASTIKA STUNG THE GERMANS TO A FURY OF MERCILESS RETALIATION.

## Chapter 1. **RUNNING THE GAUNTLET**

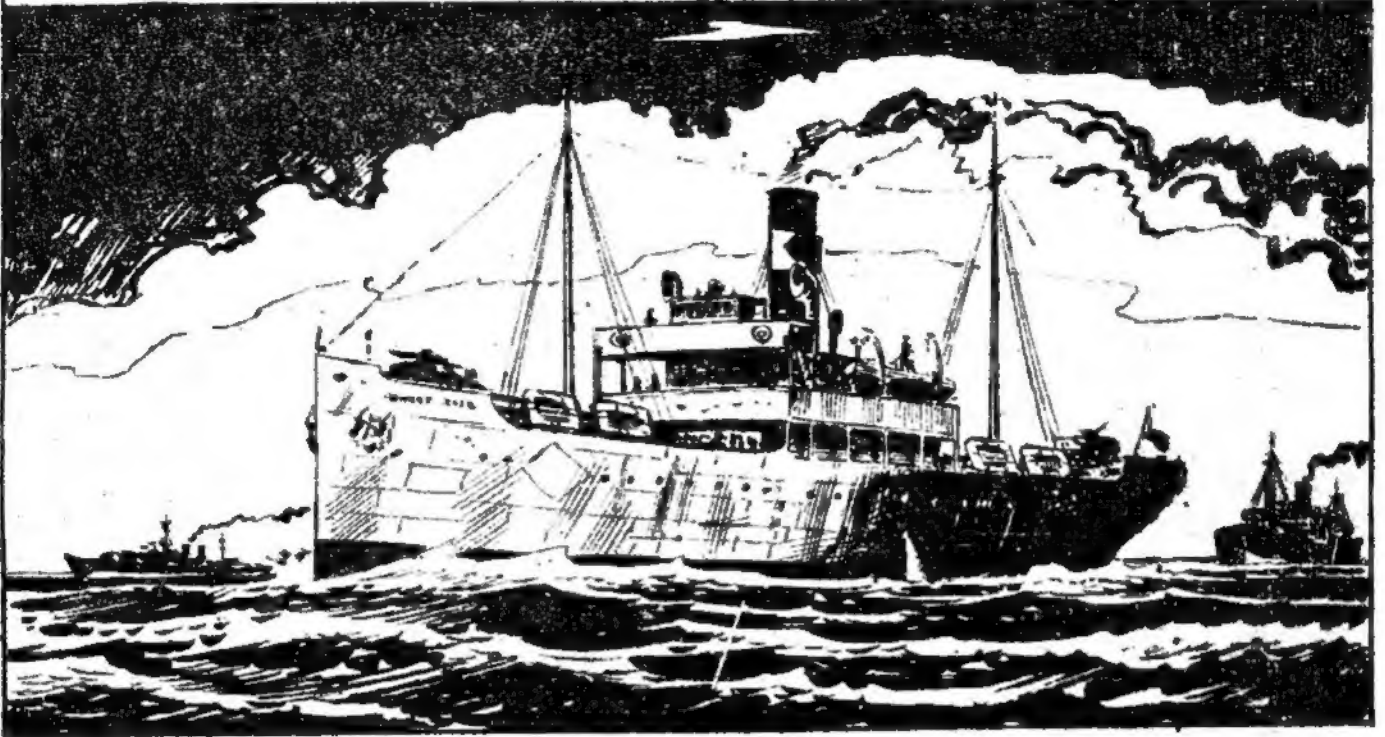
IT SOON BECAME CLEAR THAT A GERMAN ASSAULT ON THE ISLANDS WAS IMMINENT AND LAST MINUTE EFFORTS TO REINFORCE THE TINY GARRISONS WERE MADE BY THE ROYAL NAVY.



BUT EVERY DESPERATELY NEEDED CONVOY HAD TO RUN A GAUNTLET OF ATTACKS FROM GERMAN BOMBERS BASED ON THE NEARBY ISLANDS OF CRETE AND RHODES.



IN ONE OF THOSE CONVOYS WAS THE *S.S. ROMNEY ROSE*, AN ELDERLY SHORT-SEA TRADER IN PEACETIME, WHO HAD PROVED HERSELF A LADY EVEN IF A TRAMP. HER WAR RECORD WAS LONG AND LEGENDARY. HER WOUNDS HAD BEEN MASSIVE BUT NEVER MORTAL. TWICE SHE HAD BEEN MOURNED FOR SUNK, AND TWICE SURVIVED. THIRD TIME *UNLUCKY*, SAID THE SUPERSTITIOUS.



HER MASTER, TOM HALLAM, WAS NOT SUPERSTITIOUS. HE JUST KNEW THAT THE *ROMNEY ROSE* HAD A WILL TO LIVE.



THIS THOUGHT GAVE HIM A STRANGE COMFORT, FOR HE HAD A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY. IN HER AGEING HOLDS THE SHIP CARRIED AMMUNITION AND SOLDIERS OF A COUNTY REGIMENT CROWDED HER PATCHED DECKS.

## Bomb Alley

BILL PACKER, THE YOUNG FIRST OFFICER, LIKED TO RELIEVE THIS, TOO. THE ROMNEY ROSE HAD WON HIS LOYAL AFFECTION, AND BILL WAS ALWAYS QUICK TO DEFEND HER . . .

COR, SHE'S A BIT SLOW, AIN'T SHE?

LIKE ME TO TAKE A TURN AT THE OARS, ADMIRAL?

SHE MAY BE SLOW BUT SHE KEEPS AFLOAT. . . THAT'S ALL YOU'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT, SOLDIER.

AS HE JOINED HIS SKIPPER ON THE BRIDGE, BILL PACKER SCANNED THE FAMILIAR SCENE AROUND HIM . . . A CONVOY UNDER ESCORT, A SIGHT WHICH NEVER FAILED TO STIR HIS PULSES.

I'M AFRAID WE'RE DROPPING BEHIND, TOM.

THEY SHOULD HAVE GIVEN US A LONGER START, BILL. . . THE NAVY IS OVERHAULING US ALREADY.

THE SPEEDY VESSELS OF THE ROYAL NAVY ESCORT WERE NOW COMING UP TO SCREEN THE MERCHANTMEN. SOON, AT NIGHTFALL, THEY WOULD BE REACHING THE HOSTILE SCARPANTO STRAITS, KNOWN TO THE IMPERTURBABLE SAILORS AS "BOMB ALLEY."

ON THE *ROMNEY ROSE* AND EVERY SHIP IN THEIR CONVOY, LOOKOUTS WERE DOUBLY ALERT. EACH MAN KNEW THAT FROM OUT OF THAT DARKENING SKY THE DEADLY STUKA DIVE-BOMBERS WOULD ATTACK . . . **SOON !**



DOWN IN THE VETERAN FREIGHTER'S ENGINE ROOM, 'TUFFY' TAYLOR THE CHIEF ENGINEER, CURSED HIS ANCIENT CHARGE IN THE SAME BREATH THAT HE DEFENDED IT . . . FOR FEAR OF OFFENDING THE OLD LADY, AS HE PUT IT, FOR THE BURLY ENGINEER, TOO, HAD A LONG-STANDING REGARD FOR THE GALLANT, CREAKING OLD HULK . . .

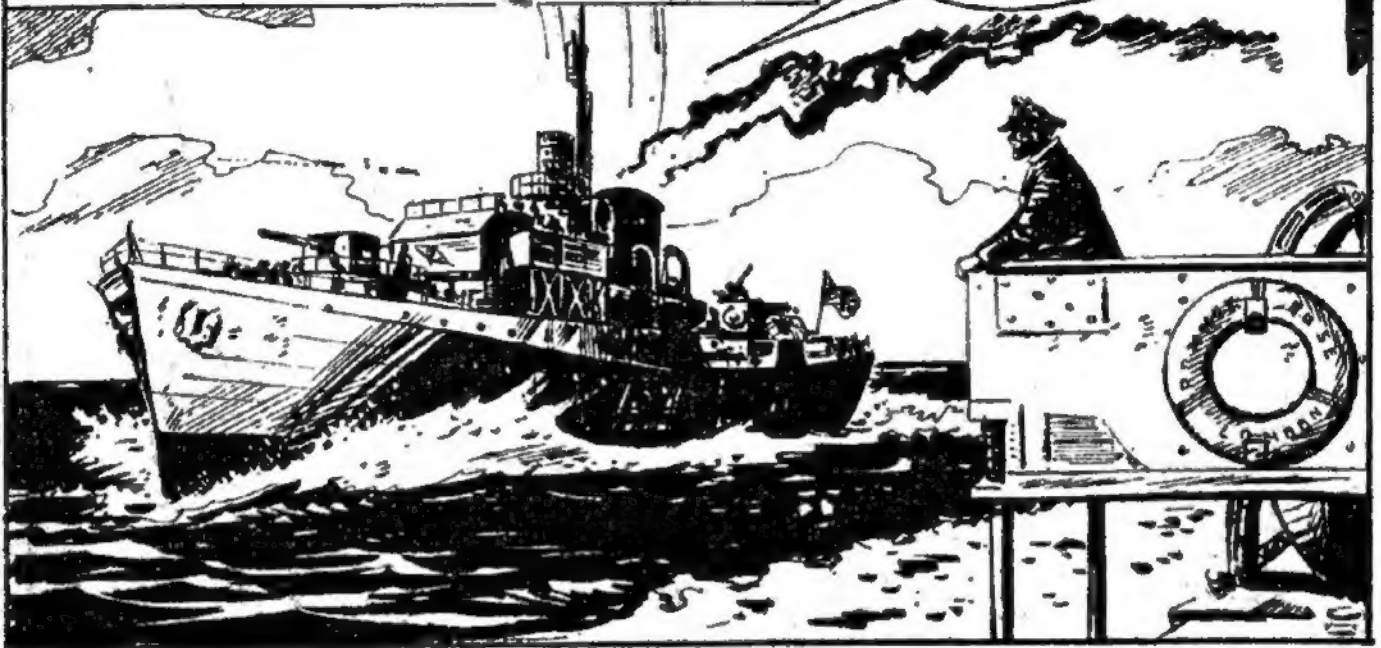


CONFOUND THIS ENGINE FOR A FLIPPING USELESS HEAP OF SCRAP-IRON! ONLY A MIRACLE KEEPS HER GOING . . . BUT MAYBE THE OLD SOUL'S EARNED A REST.



LEFT ALONE ON THE BRIDGE, BILL PACKER WATCHED WITH HALF-ENVOIOUS EYES THE DARTING APPROACH OF A NAVAL CORVETTE. WITH A SMART FLICK OF ITS STERN IT CLOSED THE ROMNEY ROSE AND THE VOICE OF ITS YOUNG COMMANDER HAILED THEM WITH CHEERFUL GUSTO . . .

AHOY, ROMNEY ROSE!  
IS THAT THE BEST THAT  
AUNTIE CAN DO?



BILL STIFFENED AT THIS SLIGHTING REFERENCE . . .

DO YOU WANT  
ME TO BUST  
HER BOILERS?



BILL HAD BANDIED WORDS TOO OFTEN WITH THESE WITTY YOUNG R.N.V.R. COMMANDERS TO LET IT WORRY HIM. TRUE, THEY WERE MOSTLY HIS OWN AGE, BUT HE DEEMED THEM JUNIOR STUFF COMPARED WITH HIS OWN LONG MERCHANT TRAINING.

FROM THE BRIDGE OF THE CORVETTE, LIEUTENANT J.D. KEYNES, OF THE ROYAL NAVAL VOLUNTEER RESERVE STARED BACK AT THE TRAMP STEAMER AND SIGHED. IT WAS HIS DUTY TO BRING UP THE REAR OF THIS CONVOY AND, CLEARLY, THE ROMNEY ROSE WAS NOT TO BE HURRIED.

THAT OLD  
CRATE'S GOING  
TO GIVE US TROUBLE  
IF SHE CAN'T PICK  
UP A BIT.

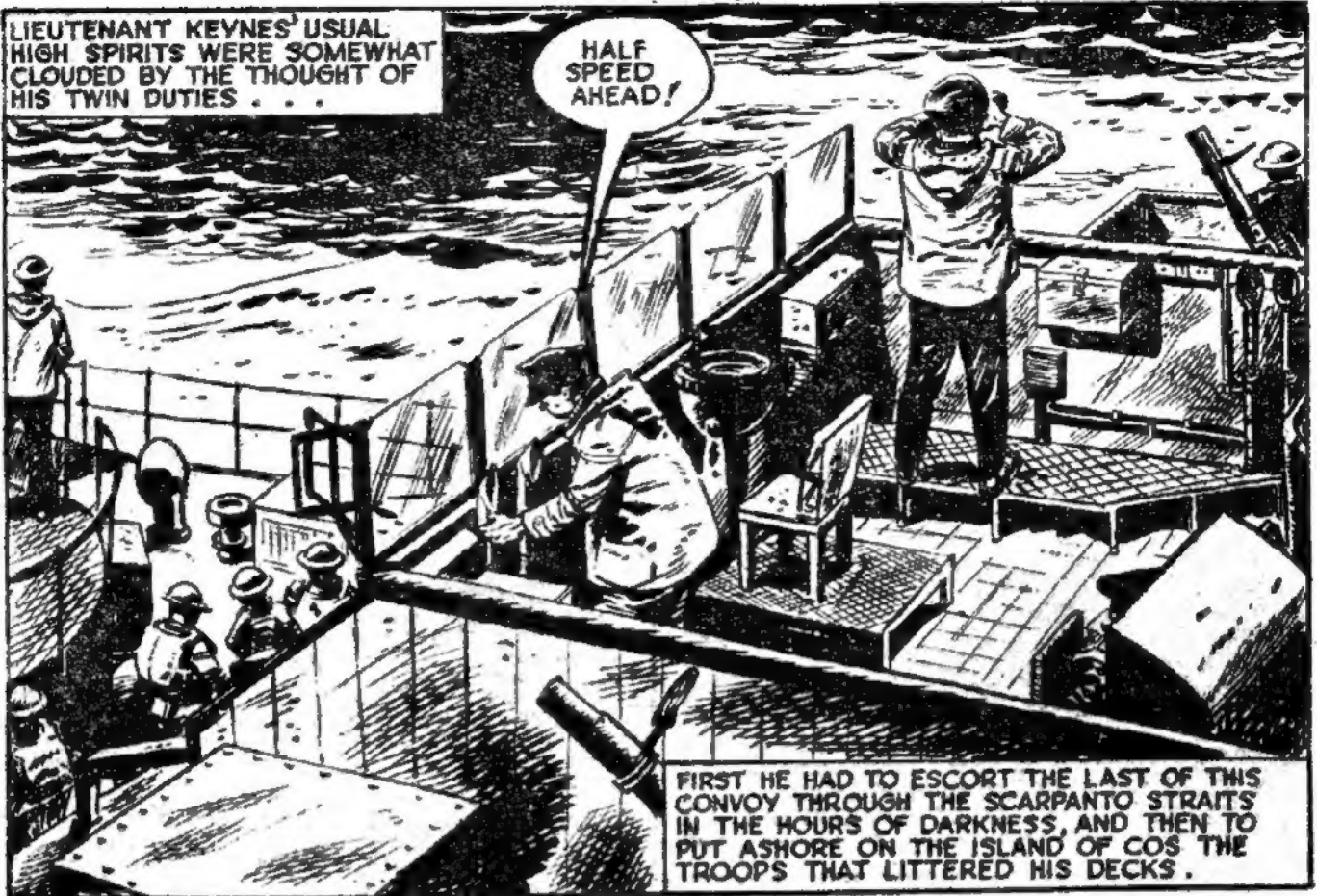


SO THAT'S  
THE ROMNEY  
ROSE? SHE'S A BIT  
OF A CHARACTER,  
I'VE HEARD.



LIEUTENANT KEYNES' USUAL HIGH SPIRITS WERE SOMEWHAT CLOUDED BY THE THOUGHT OF HIS TWIN DUTIES . . .

HALF SPEED AHEAD!



FIRST HE HAD TO ESCORT THE LAST OF THIS CONVOY THROUGH THE SCARPANTO STRAITS IN THE HOURS OF DARKNESS, AND THEN TO PUT ASHORE ON THE ISLAND OF COS THE TROOPS THAT LITTERED HIS DECKS.

BY THE TIME THE DREAD SCARPANTO STRAITS WERE REACHED, THE *ROMNEY ROSE* WAS TRAILING WELL ASTERN WITH THE CORVETTE DARTING TO AND FRO LIKE A WORRIED SHEEPDOG. A BRIGHT MOON HAD DISPERSED THE FRIENDLY DARK, BUT STILL THE THREATENED AIR ATTACK HAD NOT COME.



THEN SUDDENLY, FROM WELL AHEAD, CAME THE UNMISTAKABLE DIN OF AN AIR-SEA BATTLE . . .

HULLO, THE SHOW'S BEGUN!

THE JERRY PLANES MUST HAVE FOUND THE MAIN CONVOY.

THE CORVETTE SHOT AHEAD AS IF STUNG, LEAVING THE ROMNEY ROSE TO PLOD ON.

EVERY GUN ABOARD THE CORVETTE WAS BANGING SKYWARDS AS IT SURGED INTO THE THICK OF THE FRAY. THE SKY WAS LACED WITH WHITE-HOT TRACER AND STUDDED WITH SHELL BURSTS BUT THE ENEMY BOMBERS PRESSED RELENTLESSLY IN TO THE ATTACK.

WOW! WHAT A FIREWORK DISPLAY!



## Bomb Alley

THOSE ABOARD THE *MONKEY ROSE* WATCHING THE DISTANT CONFLICT HAD THEIR ATTENTION CLAWED BRUTALLY UPWARD AS THE SUDDEN SPINE-CHILLING SCREAM OF A STUKA DIVE-BOMBER RENT THE AIR ABOVE THEIR HEADS.



ACTION, SWIFT AND INEXHAUSTIBLE, FOLLOWED. A HUNDRED OR MORE RIFLES WERE AIMED AT THE PLANE AND THEIR CRACKLING FUSILLADE MINGLED WITH THE SPIRITED BARK OF THE 40 MM. BOFORS INTO A DEAFENING CRESCENDO.

IN RESPONSE TO TOM HALLAM'S ORDER, THE *ROMNEY ROSE* BEGAN TO LURCH OFF COURSE BUT THE NEXT SECOND, THE SKIPPER COLLAPSED WITH A GROAN AS AN UNSEEN JU. 88 SKIMMED IN AT MASTHEAD HEIGHT AND PUMPED A STREAM OF CANNON SHELL AT THE SHIP.



THE SCREECHING WHISTLE OF THE PLUMMETING BOMBS AND THE THUNDER OF THE BOMBERS' ENGINES DROWNED ALL ELSE. FOUR COLUMNS OF WATER BURST OUT OF THE SEA CLOSE TO THE SHIP'S SIDE.



BUT THE STUKA, FRANTICALLY DRAGGING ITSELF OUT OF ITS DIVE, BECAME MORTALLY SAVAGED BY THAT CONCENTRATED FIRE FROM THE *ROMNEY ROSE*.



AS THE SOLDIERS SILENTLY WATCHED THE STUKA TAKE ITS DEATH-DIVE, BILL TURNED TO DISCOVER TOM HALLAM HUDDLED AGAINST THE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE.



AN ARMY DOCTOR EXAMINED THE UNCONSCIOUS SHIP'S CAPTAIN.



BILL CLIMBED THOUGHTFULLY BACK TO THE BRIDGE AFTER EXCHANGING A FEW CHEERFUL WORDS WITH THE JUBILANT SOLDIERS. HE WAS GRIMLY AWARE THAT HE WAS NOW IN COMMAND. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GETTING THIS OLD BOAT AND THE TROOPS TO THE ISLAND WAS NOW ALL HIS.



BY NOW, THE ATTACK ON THE MAIN CONVOY HAD BEEN FINALLY BEATEN OFF . . . BUT THERE HAD BEEN CASUALTIES.

SEARCHLIGHTS!  
THAT MEANS  
SURVIVORS . . .  
I HOPE.



THE CORVETTE RETURNED LIKE A PANTING HOUND AND SLID ALONGSIDE THE ROMNEY ROSE. BILL COULD IMAGINE THE YOUNG COMMANDER ALMOST LICKING HIS LIPS FROM THE TASTE OF BATTLE . . .

AHOY, AUNTIE  
ROSE! . . . BETTER  
TO BE SLOW THAN  
SORRY, EH? YOU MISSED  
A NASTY GO THEN!





BILL'S RETORT WAS DROWNED IN A HOWL OF INDIGNATION AS HIS SOLDIER PASSENGERS PROUDLY INFORMED THE GRINNING NAVY OF THEIR OWN SUCCESS AGAINST THE ENEMY.

GARN!  
WE SHOT OFF  
OUR PIECE TOO,  
MATE!

YUS, WHILE  
YOU WAS FIDDLING  
ABOUT UP THE  
STREET!

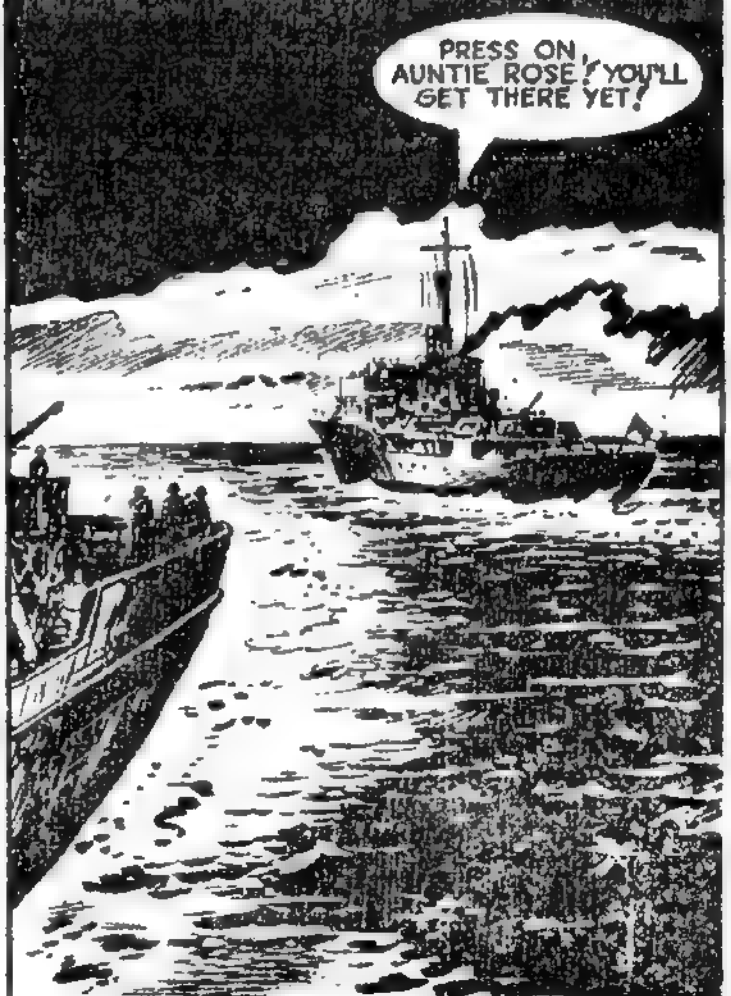
GOT A  
FLIPPIN' STUKA  
WE DID.

BILL SHOUTED HIS BAD NEWS ABOUT TOM HALLAM. AFTER A BRIEF PARLEY IT WAS DECIDED TO LEAVE THE WOUNDED SKIPPER WHERE HE WAS . . .

WITH A CHEERY WAVE KEYNES SURGED OFF TO QUARTER THE REAR OF THE CONVOY. . . ALL VERY DASHING AND SELF-CONFIDENT.



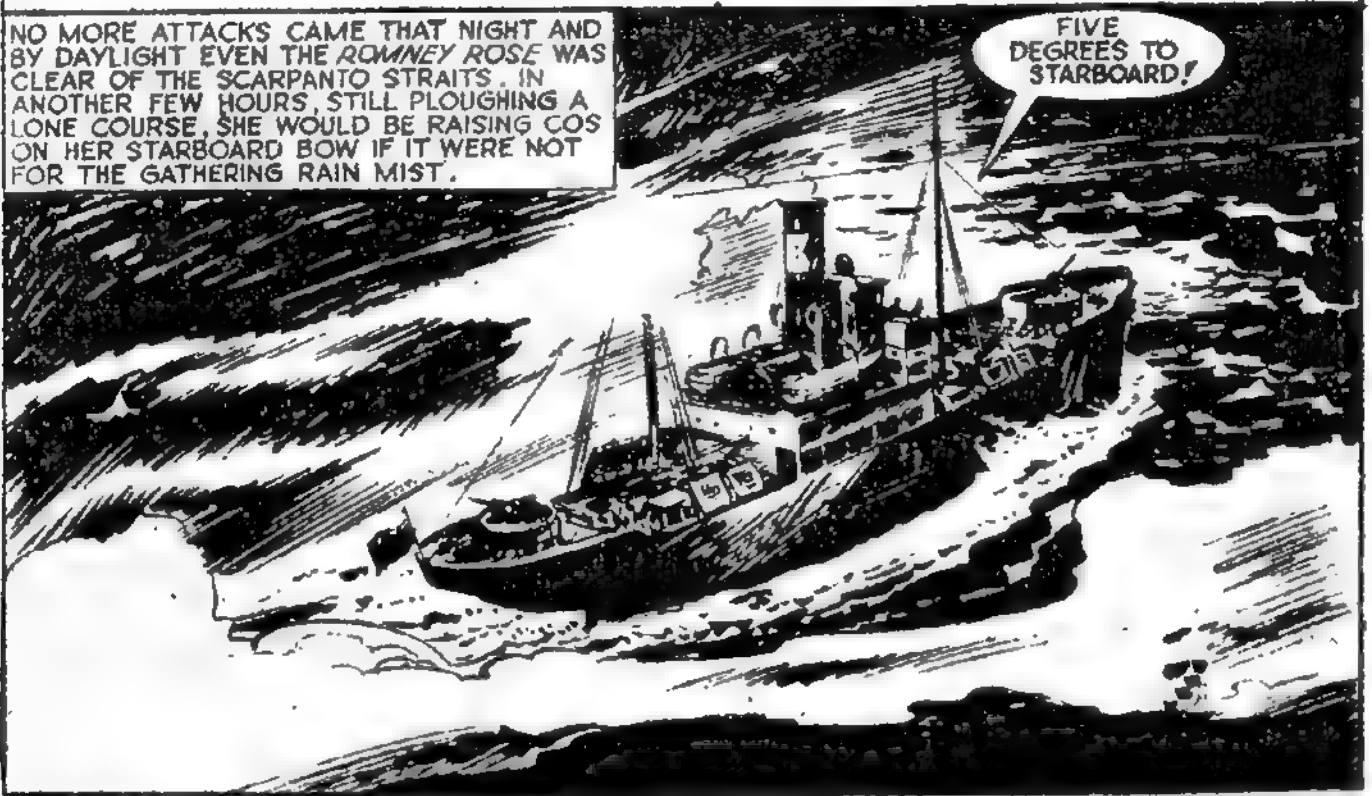
I COULD TAKE  
YOUR SKIPPER ABOARD  
AND WHIP HIM TO COS,  
BUT MY ORDERS ARE TO  
KEEP WITH STRAGGLERS  
AND, BY CRACKY, OLD  
AUNTIE ROSE CERTAINLY  
IS A STRAGGLER.



*Chapter 2.***FIRE BELOW**

NO MORE ATTACKS CAME THAT NIGHT AND BY DAYLIGHT EVEN THE *ROMNEY ROSE* WAS CLEAR OF THE SCARPANTO STRAITS. IN ANOTHER FEW HOURS, STILL PLOUGHING A LONE COURSE, SHE WOULD BE RAISING COS ON HER STARBOARD BOW IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE GATHERING RAIN MIST.

FIVE DEGREES TO STARBOARD!



IT WAS THEN THAT THE EVIL WHICH CHIEF ENGINEER TUPPY TAYLOR HAD SO LONG FEARED CAME UPON HIM. THE *ROMNEY ROSE* DEVELOPED ENGINE TROUBLE. IN FACT SHE STOPPED ALTOGETHER.

LUMME... SHE'S STOPPED!





TO THE SOLDIERS ON DECK, THE SUDDEN QUIET CAME LIKE THE FIRST WHIFF OF DANGER. THE OLD SHIP BROACHED TO ALARMINGLY AND WALLOWED IN THE SWELL.

SOMETHING'S HAPPENED!

STEADY... THERE'S NOTHING TO FLAP ABOUT!

BILL HURRIED BELOW TO THE ENGINE ROOM TO FIND TUFFY TAYLOR AND HIS MEN GASPING IN A WELTER OF HISSING STEAM.

I KNEW IT... STEAM PIPE SPLIT! TOO MUCH VIBRATION!

DO WHAT YOU CAN, TUFFY.

BILL SCRAMBLED ON DECK WITH THOUGHTS OF STEADYING THE WALLOWING SHIP WITH A SEA-ANCHOR. THEN TO HIS RELIEF HE SAW THE CORVETTE APPEAR OUT OF THE MIST AS IF BY MAGIC.

GOSH! THAT FELLER MIGHT BE A WISE-CRACKING CIVVY IN A SAILOR SUIT, BUT HE'S ALL THERE!



WHEN HE HEARD THE TROUBLE, KEYNES' FLOW OF RUEFUL WITTICISMS SO GRATED ON THE WORRIED BILL THAT HIS APPROVAL OF THE YOUNG NAVAL SKIPPER SOON GAVE WAY AGAIN TO HIS OLD INTOLERANCE.



FOR ALL HIS QUIPS, KEYNES SWIFTLY GOT A HAWSER ABOARD THE ROMNEY ROSE AND TOOK HER IN TOW. BILL FROWNED AS HE WATCHED THE NAVY MAN SET ABOUT HIS TRICKY TASK AS IF IT WERE ALL TREMENDOUS FUN.

HERE WE GO, ROMNEY ROSE, HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS!

THAT CHAP'S TOO FUNNY FOR MY LIKING!



BILL WAS NOT SURE HE APPROVED OF SUCH A LIGHT-HEARTED APPROACH TO TROUBLE AT SEA, ESPECIALLY WITH THE OLD ROMNEY ROSE HAVING A HEART ATTACK... MAYBE A FATAL ONE.



CALLING FOR A RELIEF HAND, BILL SLIPPED BELOW TO HAVE A LOOK AT TOM, WHO HAD BEEN MADE COMFORTABLE BY THE ARMY DOCTOR.

I CAN'T STAY HERE, BILL. YOU'RE IN TROUBLE.

HE'S IN NO CONDITION TO. LEAVE HIS BUNK.

DON'T WORRY, TOM. THE TOW'S GOING FINE. NOTHING FOR YOU TO DO.

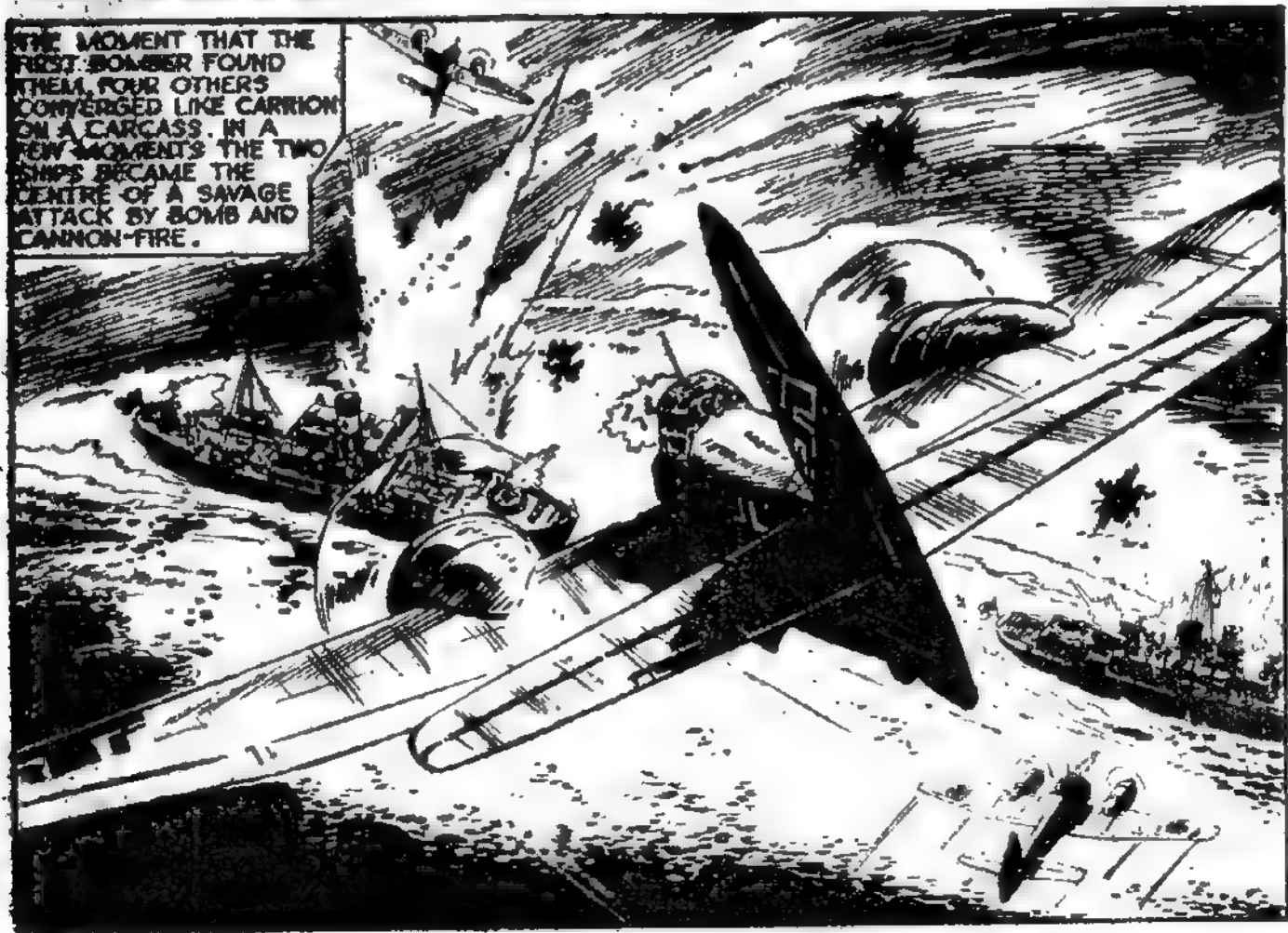
BUT A SPITEFUL FATE INTERVENED. A GERMAN GUNBOAT APPEARED OUT OF THE MIST AND SENT TWO SHELLS SCREAMING TOWARDS THE CORVETTE BEFORE HER GUN COULD BE BROUGHT TO BEAR.

STARBOARD TWENTY! RANGE FOUR FIFTY!

THE GUNBOAT IMMEDIATELY TURNED BACK INTO THE MIST AND EVERYONE KNEW THEN WHAT TO EXPECT. . . THE ENEMY WOULD RADIO THEIR POSITION. SURE ENOUGH, FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, A JUNKERS 88 BOMBER CIRCLED THE TWO SHIPS.



THE MOMENT THAT THE FIRST BOMBER FOUND THEM, FOUR OTHERS CONVERGED LIKE CARRION ON A CARCASS. IN A FEW MOMENTS THE TWO SHIPS BECAME THE CENTRE OF A SAVAGE ATTACK BY BOMB AND CANNON-FIRE.





BOTH SHIPS RETALIATED WITH A FURIOUS CLOSE BARRAGE. THE CORVETTE, WITH HER MULTIPLE MACHINE GUNS AND THUDDING POM-POMS, WAS SOON WREATHED IN HER OWN BATTLE-SMOKE.



DESPITE THE CONFUSION OF THE AIR ATTACK, BILL SUDDENLY BECAME AWARE OF AN UNEASY SLEWING ACTION OF THE DECK BENEATH HIM. HE GASPED WHEN HE REALISED THAT THE CORVETTE HAD CAST THEM OFF!



CONFOUND THAT KEYNES! THIS MAKES US A SITTING DUCK FOR SURE!

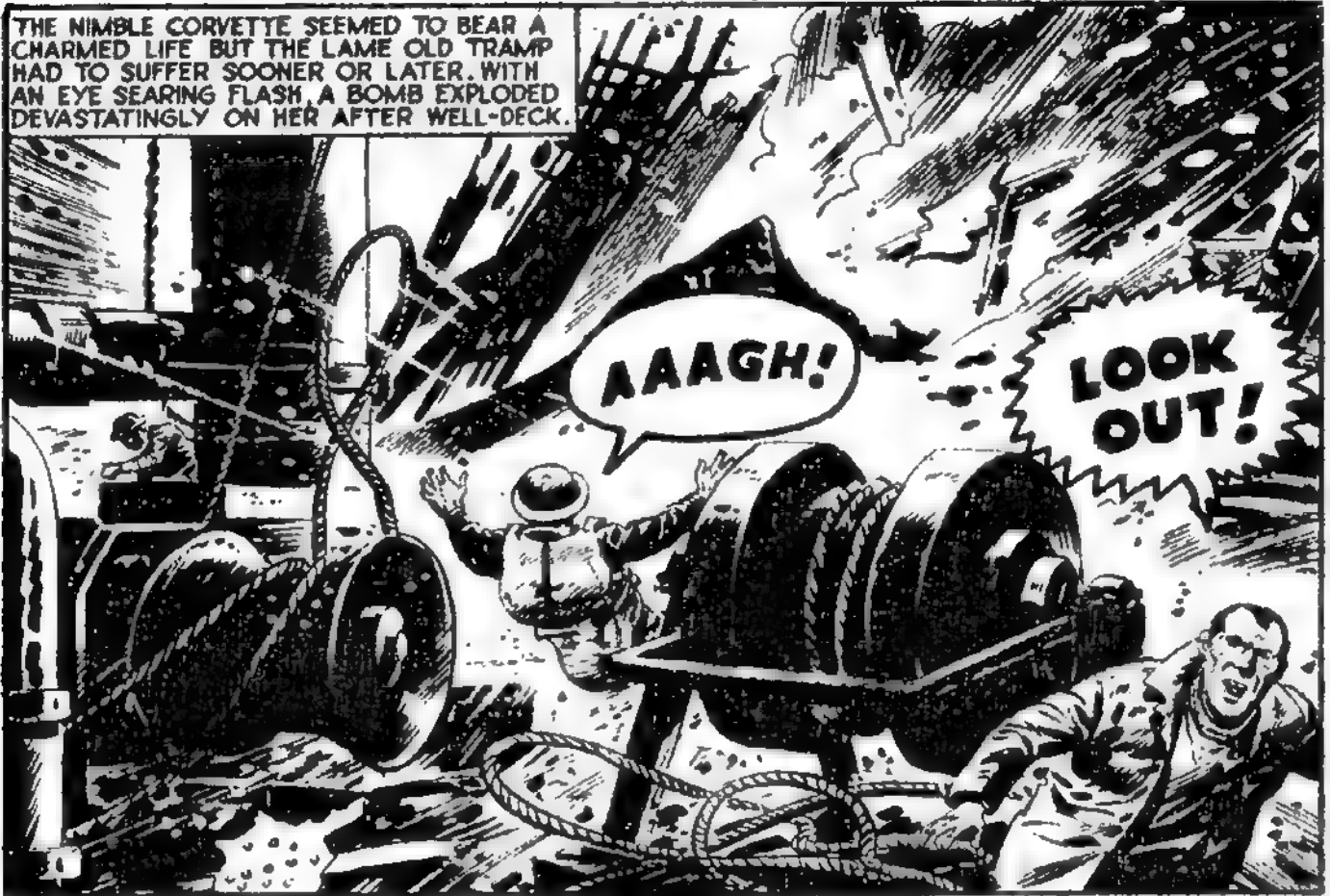
BUT KEYNES FELT THE CORVETTE WOULD FIGHT BETTER IF SHE WAS CUT FREE FROM THE TOW, THEREBY REGAINING LOST MANOEUVRABILITY. SHE CIRCLED DEFENSIVELY AROUND THE HELPLESS ROMNEY ROSE FIRING EVERY GUN IN HER ARMOURY.



AGAIN AND AGAIN THE BOMBERS THUNDERED IN TO THE ATTACK, OCCASIONALLY LEAVING TO RE-ARM AND BOMB UP.



THE NIMBLE CORVETTE SEEMED TO BEAR A CHARMED LIFE BUT THE LAME OLD TRAMP HAD TO SUFFER SOONER OR LATER. WITH AN EYE SEARING FLASH, A BOMB EXPLODED DEVASTATINGLY ON HER AFTER WELL-DECK.



A GREAT JAGGED HOLE WAS GOUGED OUT OF THE DECK AND SMOKE AND FLAME BELCHED UPWARDS. WITH TUFFY TAYLOR AT THEIR HEAD, THE CREW DASHED FORWARD WITH THE HOSES.



BUT THEIR FIRE-FIGHTING EFFORTS WERE DRIVEN BACK BY A RAKING ENEMY CROSS-FIRE WHICH THUDDING INTO THE DECK IN A WICKED DRUMBEAT. EVERY MAN CLAWED FOR COVER.

DUCK FOR YOUR LIVES!



OTHER MINOR FIRES BROKE OUT AS THE OLD SHIP REELED UNDER THE SUCCESSIVE ATTACKS AND ONLY THE MIST SAVED HER FROM MORE BOMB HITS. BILL WORKED HIS WAY ALONG TO WHERE TUFFY REPORTED GRIMLY TO HIM.

WE'RE TRYING TO KEEP IT AWAY FROM THE AMMO IN THAT HOLD, BILL.

GOOD, IF THE FIRE CREEPS DOWN THERE WE'VE HAD IT!



THEN, AS IF FATE HAD RELENTED, THERE CAME THE WELCOME SIGHT OF FRIENDLY FIGHTERS FROM COS AIRFIELD, SUMMONED BY THE CORVETTE'S RADIO. THE AVENGING WHINE OF THESE STREAKING HURRICANES SOUNDED TO THE SORELY-TRIED MEN LIKE THE SWEETEST MUSIC.

LOOK!  
HURRICANES!

UP THE  
RAF!





## Bomb Alley

THE MOMENT THE SKIES WERE CLEARED OF ENEMY PLANES, THE CORVETTE CAME ALONGSIDE THE ROMNEY ROSE, HER COMMANDER GAUGING THE EXTENT OF THE FIRE.



BUT THE NAVAL MAN HAD JUST RECEIVED AN URGENT WARNING OF AN ENEMY ATTACK ON THE ISLAND.



KEYNES BROUGHT THE CORVETTE ALONGSIDE AND THE TWO SHIPS WERE LASHED TOGETHER. THE TRANSFER BEGAN...



PRESENTLY, WITH A DOUBLE LOAD OF MEN CROWDING HER DECKS, THE CORVETTE SPED AWAY FOR COS, LEAVING BILL TO WATCH HER GO WITH MIXED FEELINGS.

IT'S A RELIEF TO HAVE THOSE ARMY CHAPS OFF MY HANDS BUT WE'RE LEFT IN A FINE PICKLE... ADRIFT WITH NO ENGINES AND LIABLE TO BLOW UP AT ANY MINUTE.

THEN BILL SWUNG ROUND AS A CRY OF ALARM RANG OUT. IT WAS ONE OF THE FIRE PARTY...

WE NEED HELP... THE FIRE'S GOT A FRESH HOLD!



ALL HANDS WERE NOW TRYING TO BEAT BACK THE SPREADING WALL OF FLAME. TUFFY TAYLOR PAUSED A SECOND TO EXCHANGE A WORRIED GRIMACE WITH THE YOUNG DEPUTY SKIPPER.



FOR BILL PACKER THIS WAS A TIME OF DECISION. HE WAS IN COMMAND AND MUST JUDGE AT WHAT MOMENT DUTY BECAME FOOL-HARDY SUICIDE.

NOW FAR HAS THE FIRE GOT INTO THE HOLD... THAT'S THE QUESTION!



SUDDENLY THERE WAS A LOUD REPORT FROM THE HEART OF THE FIRE...

LOOK OUT! THAT COULD BE AMMO!

OR JUST A BULKHEAD IN THE HEAT. STEADY, LADS!





EVERY EYE TURNED TO THE NEW SKIPPER. HIS WAS THE DECISION. WAS THIS THE MOMENT TO ABANDON SHIP... TO ABANDON THE GALLANT OLD *ROMNEY ROSE*.



TORN BY CONFLICTING EMOTIONS, BILL GAVE THE MOST DREADED ORDER AT SEA...

ABANDON  
SHIP! AWAY  
BOATS!



THERE WAS A SWIFT YET ORDERLY "AWAY BOATS" AND SOON BILL FOUND HIMSELF THE LAST SOUL ABOARD THE STRICKEN SHIP. THEN A CRACKLE OF EXPLODING .303 AMMUNITION CAME FROM BELOW DECKS... AND BILL WAITED FOR NO MORE.



MAN THE OARS! TRIM THE BOAT, THERE!

THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME... THE OLD SHIP'S HAD IT AT LAST!

BILL DROPPED INTO TUFFY TAYLOR'S BOAT AND THEY PUSHED OFF, ROWING FRANTICALLY FOR THE SAFETY OF DISTANCE. BILL LOOKED BACK WITH A HEAVY HEART...



I WONDER IF I DID RIGHT...?

AND STILL THERE WAS NO EXPLOSION!

## Chapter 3. LOST WITHOUT TRACE

FOR CLOSE ON THREE HOURS THE SHIP'S COMPANY WAITED TO BE PICKED UP, KEEPING POSITION SO THAT THEY SHOULD BE FOUND. THE *ROMNEY ROSE* HAD DRIFTED AWAY AND NO EXPLOSION HAD REACHED THE EARS OF HER CREW. THEN AT LAST THE CORVETTE APPEARED.

LOOK, BOYS  
... HERE  
SHE COMES!



THE CORVETTE TOOK THEM ABOARD AND LIEUTENANT KEYNES LISTENED TO BILL'S STORY WITH A WRY LOOK THAT SOMEHOW IRRITATED THE MERCHANT NAVY MAN.

EXPLOSION,  
OLD BOY?  
WHAT EXPLOSION?





TO BILL, THIS AMUSEMENT SEEMED TO INDICATE FRANK DISBELIEF AND WHEN HE HAD FINISHED HIS REPORT, HE GLOOMILY MOVED AWAY. NOT EVEN TUFFY TAYLOR'S SYMPATHY COULD DISPEL HIS BITTER FEELING OF FAILURE.

DON'T TAKE IT SO HARD, BILL, YOU ACTED FOR THE BEST.



LIEUTENANT KEYNES, WITH NO OTHER MOTIVE THAN TO FIND AND SINK THE *ROMNEY ROSE* FOR THE HAZARD SHE WAS, PUT THE CORVETTE ON A SEARCH OF THE MIST-COVERED SEAS...

DOUBLE THE LOOK-OUT!



IN HIS GRIM MOOD, BILL COULD ONLY SEE IN THE NAVY MAN'S ACTION A PATRONISING ATTEMPT TO RECTIFY HIS OWN ERRORS, AND THE THOUGHT RANKLED.

I'LL LAY SIX-TO-FOUR WE FIND THE OLD DEAR IN TEN MINUTES!



BUT THEY DID NOT FIND THE ROMNEY ROSE. BILL DEVOUTLY HOPED THAT SHE HAD QUIETLY SUNK, WHILE KEYNES' JOCLARITY DID NOTHING TO IMPROVE HIS DEPRESSION.

BILL BORE THE BANTER IN SILENCE. AT LAST, WITH A TYPICAL BREEZY REMARK, KEYNES CALLED OFF THE SEARCH.

JUST IMAGINE THE ADMIRAL OLD BOY. BANG ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH OLD AUNTIE ROSE? TALK ABOUT A SCREAMING OF BRAKES! EEEEN!



WE'D BETTER BEAT IT BACK TO COS. THERE'S A BIT OF A 'SHEMOZZLE' GOING ON THERE.



AFTER AN HOUR'S STEAMING, THEY ENTERED THE TINY HARBOUR OF COS TO FIND A BATTLE ROYAL IN PROGRESS . . .

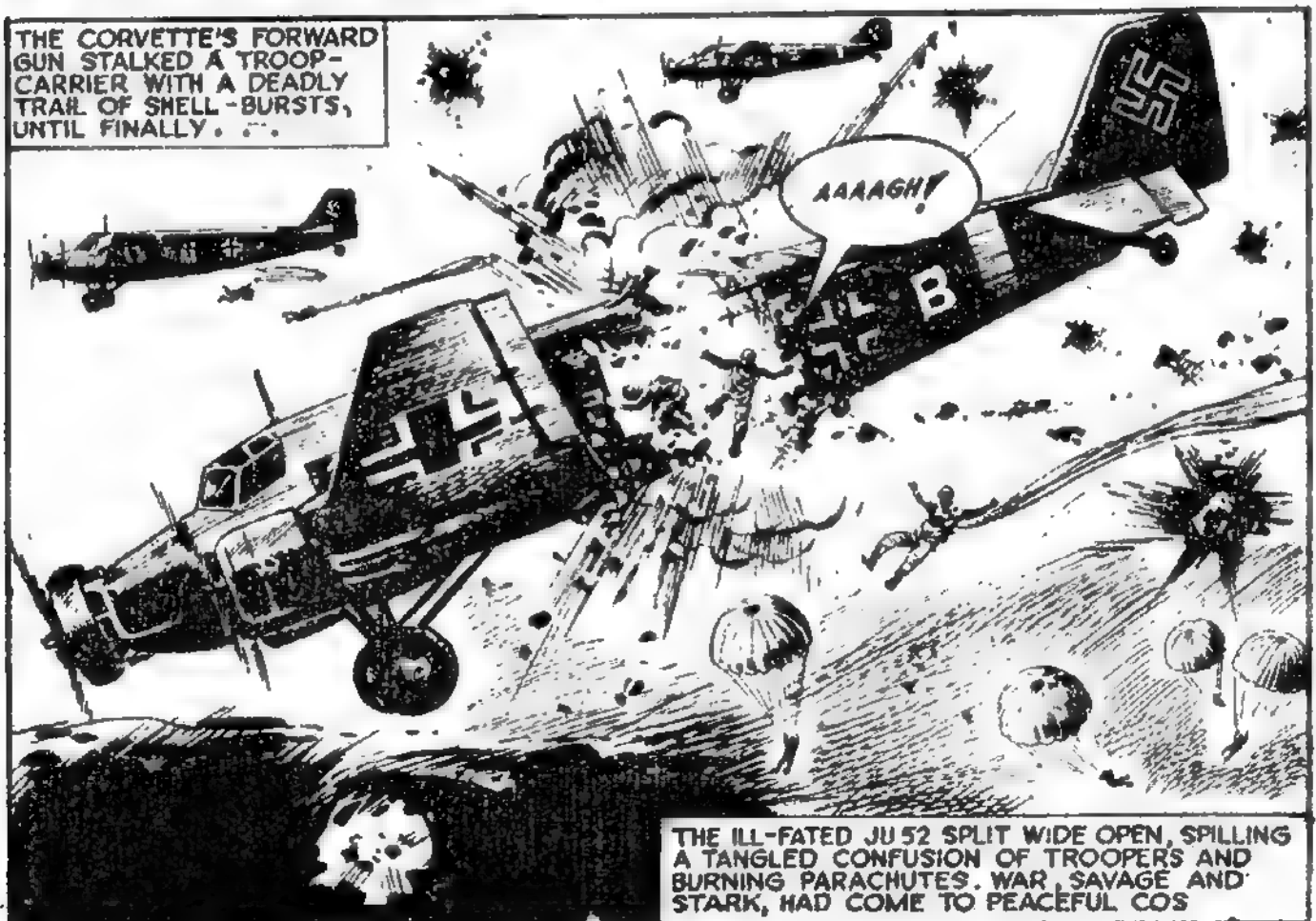




THE CORVETTE DASHED IN AND JOINED TWO OTHER NAVY SHIPS IN PUTTING UP A BRISK BARRAGE OF FIRE TO AID THE BRITISH SHORE DEFENCES. . .

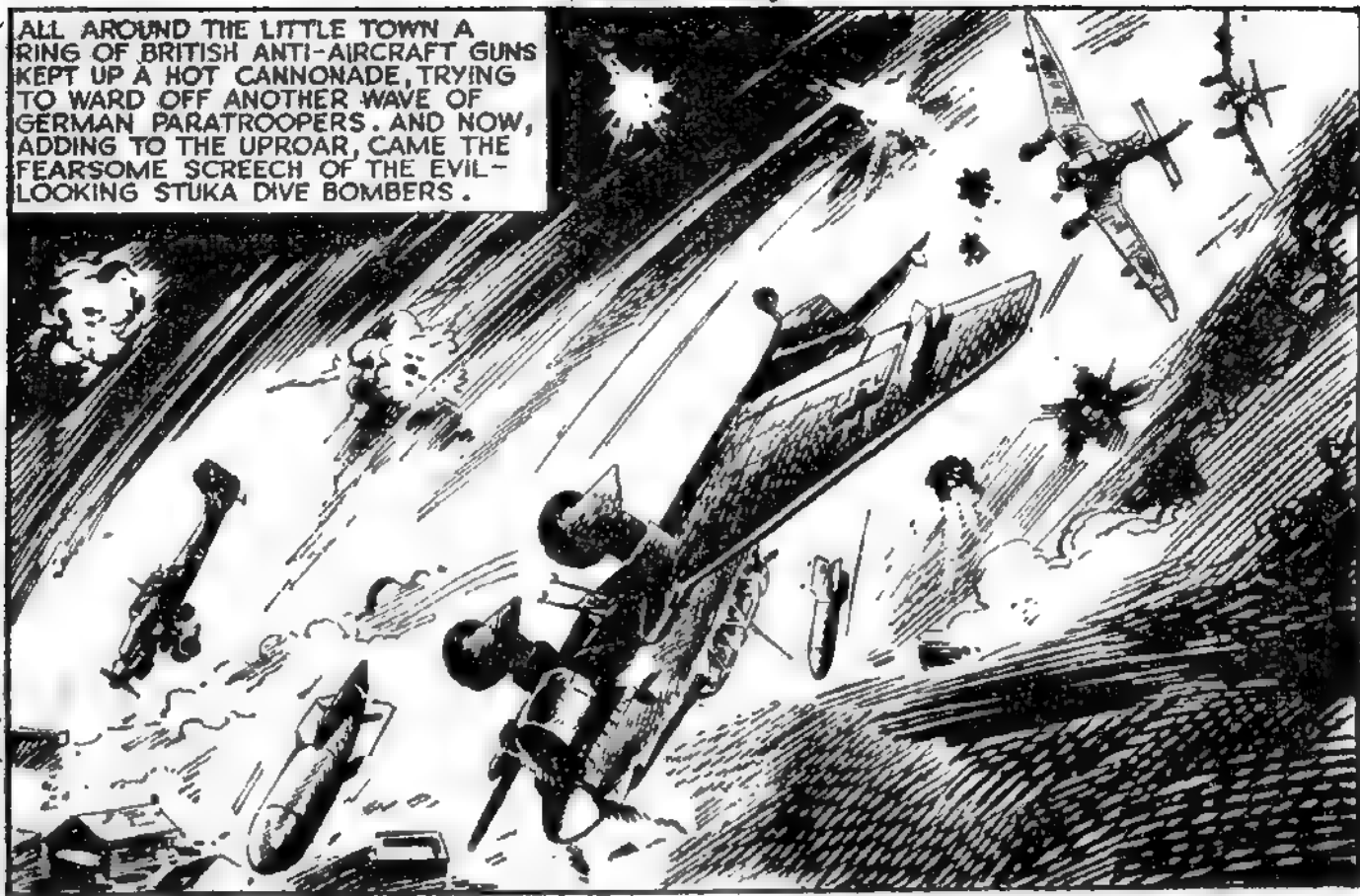


THE CORVETTE'S FORWARD GUN STALKED A TROOP-CARRIER WITH A DEADLY TRAIL OF SHELL-BURSTS, UNTIL FINALLY. . .



THE ILL-FATED JU 52 SPLIT WIDE OPEN, SPILLING A TANGLED CONFUSION OF TROOPERS AND BURNING PARACHUTES. WAR, SAVAGE AND STARK, HAD COME TO PEACEFUL COS

ALL AROUND THE LITTLE TOWN A RING OF BRITISH ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS KEPT UP A HOT CANNONADE, TRYING TO WARD OFF ANOTHER WAVE OF GERMAN PARATROOPERS. AND NOW, ADDING TO THE UPROAR, CAME THE FEARSOME SCREECH OF THE EVIL-LOOKING STUKA DIVE BOMBERS.



AS IF GALVANISED BY THIS DESPERATE SCENE, BILL SPRANG TO HELP FERRY AMMUNITION ASHORE, HIS EXAMPLE BEING SWIFTLY FOLLOWED BY TUFFY TAYLOR AND OTHERS OF THE ROMNEY ROSE. IT WAS A MOTLEY ASSORTMENT OF CRAFT THAT OFFERED ITSELF FOR THIS DANGEROUS TASK.



ON THE SECOND RUN TO THE SHORE, A BOMB EXPLODED CLOSE BESIDE THE HEAVILY LADEN BOAT AND THE PETTY OFFICER AT THE TILLER WAS FLUNG ASIDE. INSTANTLY, BILL LEAPED FORWARD.



TO AND FRO THE LITTLE CRAFT STAGGERED, THEIR CREWS FRENZIEDLY UNLOADING THE VITAL AMMUNITION AND THEN RETURNING THROUGH BOMB SPATTERED WATER FOR MORE.



DRENCHED WITH BOMB SPRAY AND WITH THEIR EARS RINGING FROM STUKA ATTACKS, BILL AND TUFFY PAUSED IN THEIR BACK-ACHING TASK OF GETTING THE AMMUNITION CASES ASHORE AND ON TO TRUCKS.



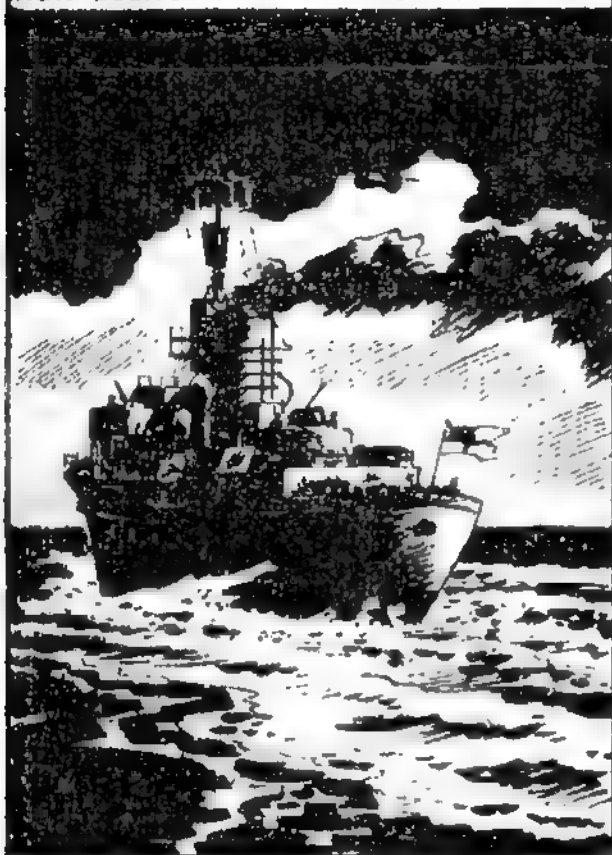
LOOKS LIKE JERRY MEANS TO CHUCK US OFF THE ISLAND.

AND I BET THEY'LL BE LANDING MORE TROOPS DURING THE NIGHT TO BACK UP THIS LOT.

BILL KNEW THAT THE ALLIES, IF OUTNUMBERED IN THE AIR, WERE STILL MASTERS OF THE SEAS. THE GERMANS WOULD WAIT TILL DARK BEFORE ATTEMPTING THEIR LANDINGS.



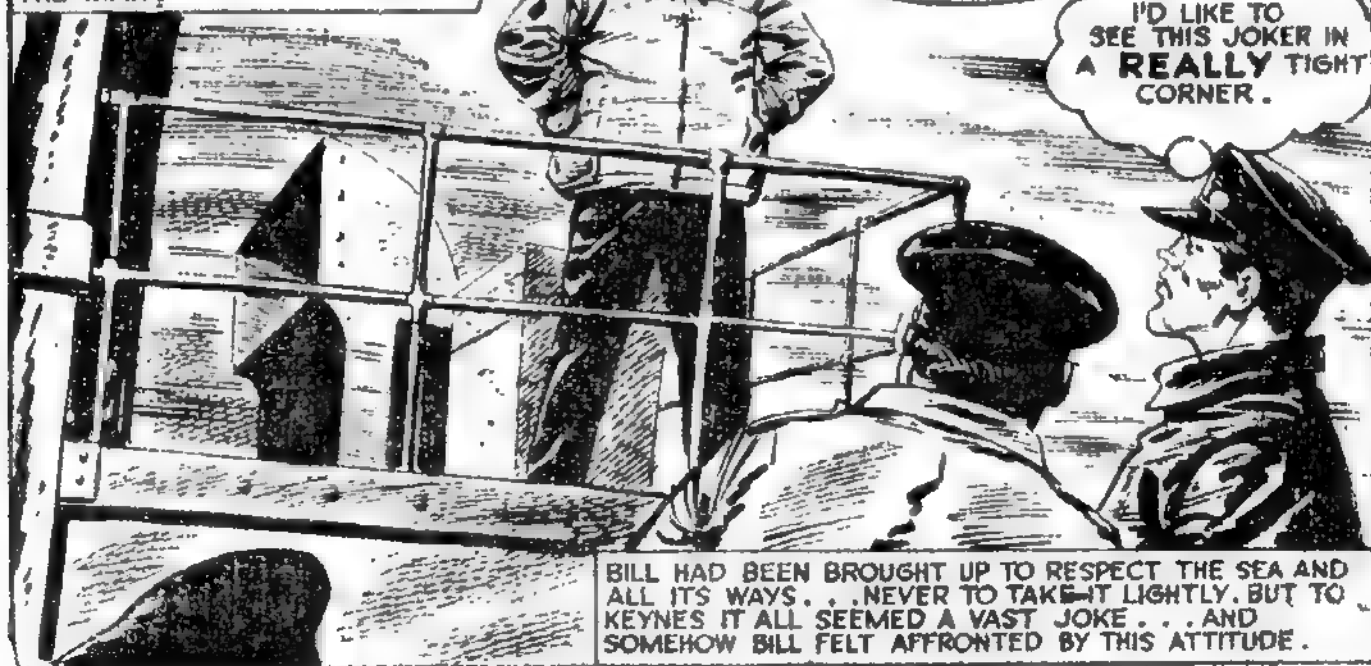
LIEUTENANT KEYNES WAS ALSO AWARE OF THIS, AND AS SOON AS HIS AMMUNITION SUPPLIES WERE ASHORE HE CALLED ALL ABOARD AND MOVED OFF TO PATROL THE ISLAND AGAINST ENEMY INVASION. IT WAS NOW DUSK.



ALTHOUGH DOG TIRED FROM HIS EFFORTS, BILL MOVED ANXIOUSLY AMONG THE REMNANTS OF HIS CREW, ASKING NEWS OF THEIR SHIPMATES. NO ONE WAS CERTAIN . . .



KEYNES, WHOSE FIGHTING SPIRIT WAS WELL ROUSED, NOW CAME ALONG IN FINE FETTER. BILL FELT HE COULD WILLINGLY APPROVE OF THE YOUNG COMMANDER IF HE WERE NOT SO JOCLAR. DID NOTHING SOBER THE MAN?



THE BENT PLATES WERE SHORED UP AND THE CORVETTE SLID QUIETLY THROUGH THE NIGHT WATERS. SUDDENLY, THE LITTLE WARSHIP RANG TO THE CLANGOUR OF ALARM GONGS. AHEAD, A GERMAN LANDING FORCE WAS BEING FERRIED SHOREWARD FROM A PARENT SUPPLY SHIP.



ENEMY SHIPS  
AHEAD, SIR!

READY ALL  
GUNS, NUMBER  
ONE. STEADY  
ON COURSE!

THE CORVETTE OPENED UP WITH A SHATTERING DIN ON THE MULTIPLE MACHINE GUNS AND AT THE SAME TIME HIGH EXPLOSIVE SHELLS CRASHED INTO THE GERMAN SHIP CONVENIENTLY OUTLINED AGAINST THE LAST OF THE DAYLIGHT.



HARD  
A-STARBOARD!

THE CORVETTE SWUNG UNDER FULL RUDDER, HER THIN FLANKS QUIVERING FROM THE VIBRATION OF HER POUNDING GUNS.

BILL SPRANG TO RELIEVE A WOUNDED GUNNER AND FOUND HIMSELF SWINGING THE THUDDING WEAPON WITH CALM PRECISION, APPROVING KEYNES' MANOEUVRING OF THE CORVETTE WHICH ALLOWED HER GUNNERS TO LAY IN TURN.



ONCE AGAIN THE GERMANS WERE PAINFULLY REMINDED OF THE HAZARDS OF A BRITISH-DOMINATED SEA. LASHED BY THE CASCADE OF FIRE, THE FERRIES FALTERED AND THEN SLOWLY SANK, THROWING THEIR CARGO AND PASSENGERS INTO THE SEA.





THE GERMAN PARENT SHIP LIMPED AWAY IN THE DARKNESS AND THE CORVETTE SOUNDED THE 'CEASE FIRE'. THE SUDDEN QUIET THAT FOLLOWED THAT EAR-NUMBING CLAMOUR COULD ALMOST BE FELT. BILL, STILL FEELING STRANGELY CALM, STEPPED BACK FROM THE SMOKING GUNS TO FIND TUFFY TAYLOR GRINNING IN APPROVAL . . .

WELL, IT'S A TREAT TO SEE THE FUN FOR ONCE INSTEAD OF BEING COOPED UP BELOW. GOOD SHOOTING, BILL!

POOR DEVILS . . . THEY HADN'T A CHANCE.

BILL REALISED WITH SUDDEN CLARITY THAT HE WAS NOT CUT OUT FOR A MAN OF WAR. HE LACKED KEYNES' HOT-BLOODED RESPONSE TO CHALLENGE. MAYBE IT WAS A GOOD THING HE HAD STUCK TO THE MERCHANT SERVICE.

SATISFIED THAT THE GERMAN SURVIVORS WOULD DRIFT ASHORE, KEYNES SET OFF ONCE MORE TO LOOK HOPEFULLY FOR A FRESH QUARRY WHILE BILL PACKER AND HIS CREW SNATCHED SOME SLEEP. THEN, IN THE DARK EARLY HOURS . . .

DO MY OLD EYES SEE SHAPES, NUMBER ONE?

I'M SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU, SIR, I'M AFRAID THEY'RE FRIENDLY!

FEELING RESTLESS, BILL JOINED THE BRIDGE IN TIME TO SEE THE SUB-LIEUTENANT PROVED CORRECT. A WINKING SIGNAL LAMP DECLARED THE NEWCOMERS TO BE A BRITISH DESTROYER AND TWO GUNBOATS MAKING FOR COS WITH MORE MEN AND SUPPLIES.

THEY CAN ONLY BE BRINGING A TRICKLE BUT I SUPPOSE IT'LL HELP.

IT'LL BE NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT THE GERMANS MUST HAVE LANDED TONIGHT!



LISTENING TO THIS, BILL THOUGHT OF THE SUPPLIES LYING IN THE HOLDS OF THE ROMNEY ROSE, ANTI-AIRCRAFT SHELLS ESPECIALLY. THEY MUST BE SORELY NEEDED BY THE ISLAND DEFENDERS.

I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OLD ROMNEY ROSE?



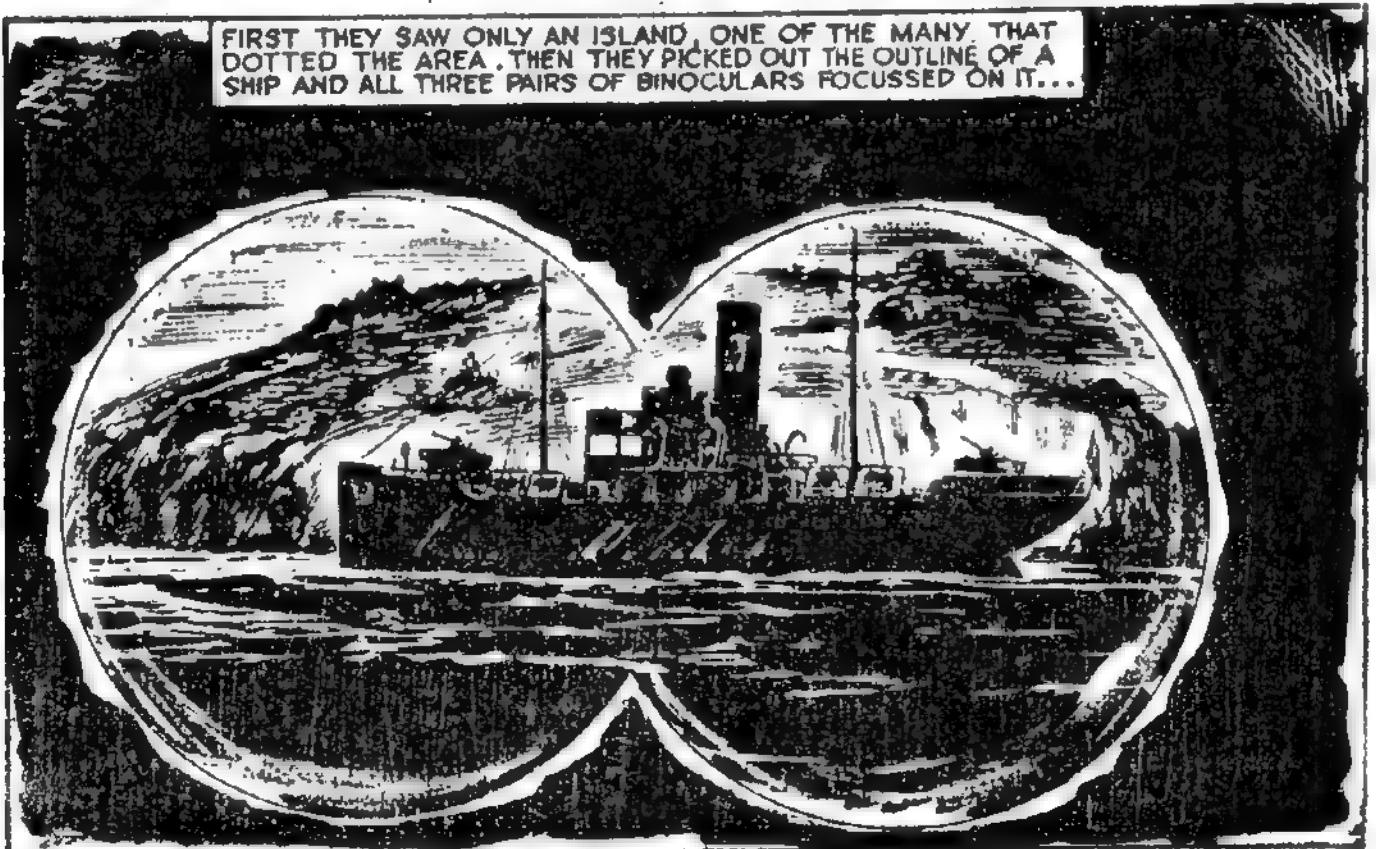
## Chapter 4. A GALLANT OLD SHIP

AN HOUR LATER, THE CLOUDS  
DISPERSED AND A LOW MOON LIT  
THE SCENE. SUDDENLY, THE CRY  
OF THE LOOK-OUT REACHED THE  
OFFICERS ON THE BRIDGE...

STARBOARD  
NINETY!  
UNIDENTIFIED  
SHIP, SIR!



FIRST THEY SAW ONLY AN ISLAND, ONE OF THE MANY THAT  
DOTTED THE AREA. THEN THEY PICKED OUT THE OUTLINE OF A  
SHIP AND ALL THREE PAIRS OF BINOCULARS FOCUSED ON IT...





A SUDDEN HOWL OF AMUSEMENT BROKE FROM KEYNES. HE SNATCHED DOWN HIS GLASSES AND STARED AT BILL IN DELIGHTED COMPREHENSION . . .

IT'S THE ROMNEY  
ROSE, OLD BOY!  
HER FIRE'S OUT!



YES, HER FIRE WAS OUT. SHE HAD NOT EXPLODED . . . OR SUNK! ONLY THE HUMAN ELEMENT HAD FAILED.



FOR TO BILL, THE PROFESSIONAL SAILOR, THIS WAS AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN . . . TO DESERT A SHIP WHEN IT WAS PROVED UNNECESSARY. A SEARING FLUSH STAINED HIS CHEEKS.

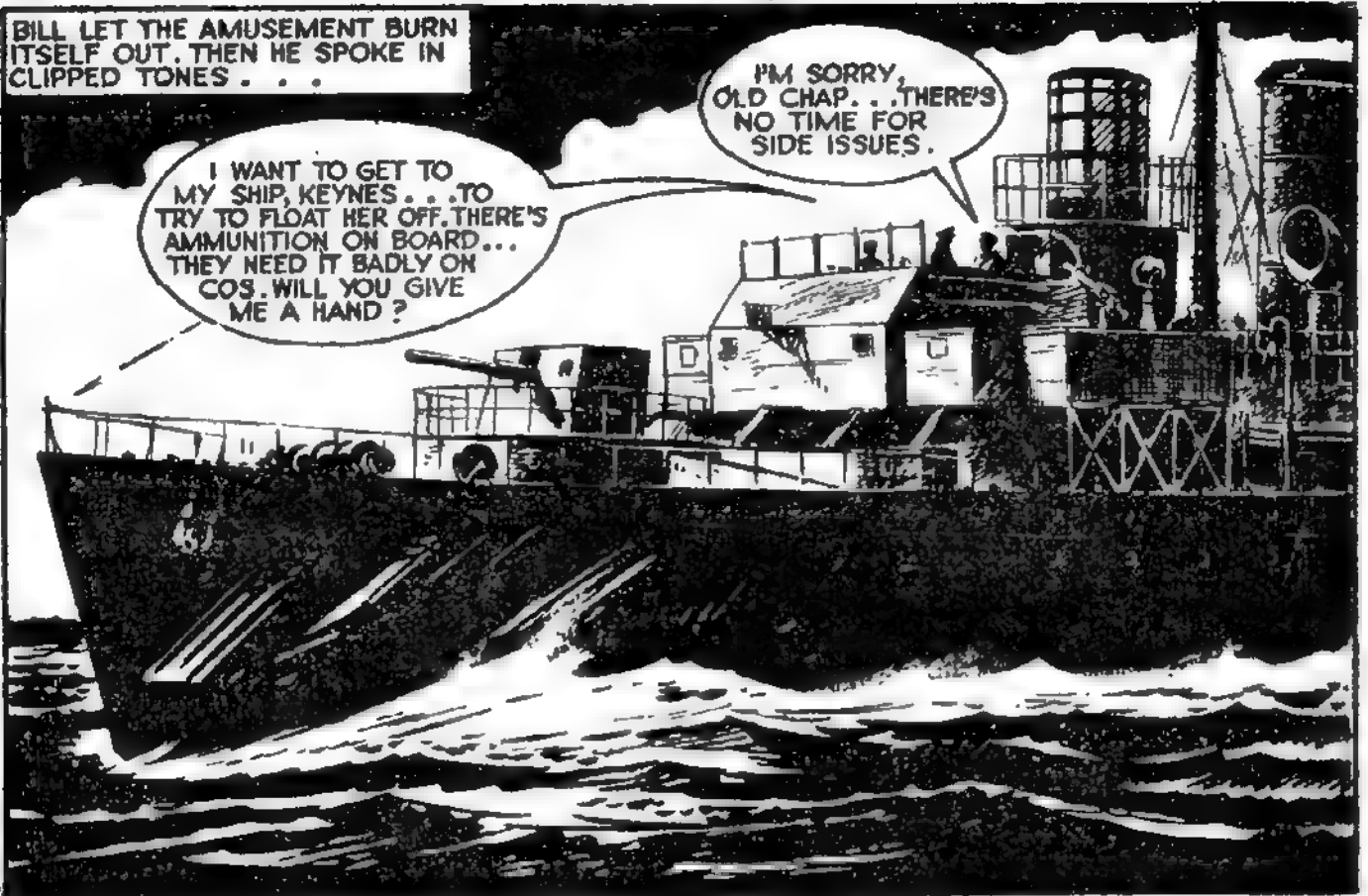
WHEREAS TO KEYNES, THE NON-PROFESSIONAL, THE SIGHT OF THE TRAMP STUCK INGLORIOUSLY ON THE MUD, AND EVEN MORE, THE LOOK ON POOR BILL'S FACE, SENT THE NAVY MAN INTO OUTBURSTS OF AMUSEMENT.



BILL LET THE AMUSEMENT BURN ITSELF OUT. THEN HE SPOKE IN CLIPPED TONES . . .

I WANT TO GET TO MY SHIP, KEYNES . . . TO TRY TO FLOAT HER OFF. THERE'S AMMUNITION ON BOARD . . . THEY NEED IT BADLY ON COS. WILL YOU GIVE ME A HAND ?

I'M SORRY, OLD CHAP . . . THERE'S NO TIME FOR SIDE ISSUES.



AFTER SOME PERSUASION, HOWEVER, KEYNES WENT SO FAR AS TO CLOSE WITH THE ROMNEY ROSE AND TO LET BILL HAVE THE SHIP'S BOAT. IN THIS, BILL AND THE REMAINDER OF HIS CREW PULLED AWAY IN SILENCE, EXCHANGING A BRIEF FAREWELL WITH THE CORVETTE WHICH IMMEDIATELY RACED ON HER WAY.



BILL'S EYE ROVED OVER THE SMALL COMPANY, JUDGING THEM SUFFICIENT TO SAIL THE ROMNEY ROSE. HE WAS GLAD TUFFY WAS THERE.

THINK YOU CAN GET HER GOING, TUFFY?

AFTER SEEING THIS MIRACLE I RECKON ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN!



THEY FOUND THE WONDERFUL OLD SHIP ON A SAND BAR, BROADSIDE ON WHERE THE WIND HAD CARRIED HER. BILL'S MOST URGENT PROBLEM WAS TO ASSESS WAYS AND MEANS OF REFLOATING HER.

I'LL TELL YOU BETTER WHEN WE GET ABOARD.

SHE LOOKS NONE TOO BAD, BILL.

WELL BLESS 'ER OLD 'EART!





WORKING ROUND TO THE SHOREWARD SIDE, THEY SCRAMBLED ABOARD TO FIND THE WELL-DECK A CHARRED RUIN. THE HOLD ITSELF IN THE BAFFLING MOONLIGHT YAWNED BLACK AS A PIT. INSIDE THEY HEARD THE EERIE SWILL OF SEA WATER AS THE SHIP GENTLY ROLLED.



BY MID-MORNING, TUFFY HAD PATCHED THE STEAM PIPING. THE ENGINES WORKED BUT SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO REFLOAT THE SHIP WERE UNSUCCESSFUL.



## Bomb Alley

SUDDENLY BILL PACKER NOTICED  
A BOAT APPROACHING. WAS IT  
FRIEND OR ENEMY?

DUCK,  
EVERYBODY!  
WE'VE GOT  
VISITORS!



IT PROVED TO BE A GERMAN  
MINER LAUNCH.

GERMAN  
PARATROOPERS!

YUS...  
COME TO  
INVESTIGATE

QUIET, LADS.  
KEEP OUT  
OF SIGHT.



WOULD THE GERMANS BELIEVE THE ROMNEY ROSE ABANDONED? AFTER LONG MINUTES OF SCRUTINY, THE GERMAN LAUNCH CAUTIOUSLY NOSED IN . . .

YOU THINK SHE IS DESERTED, HERR HAUPTMANN?

NOW SHOULD I KNOW, BLOCKHEAD?



BILL WAITED TENSELY, TRYING TO JUDGE WHEN THE BOAT WOULD BE ALONGSIDE. THE SEAMEN'S FINGERS TIGHTENED ON THEIR TRIGGERS . . .

READY, LADS . . .





THE GERMANS WERE ALERT FOR ANY ATTACK BUT WERE STARTLED BY THE SUDDENNESS AND FURY OF IT. BILL AND HIS MEN EMPTIED THEIR GUNS UPON THE HAPLESS SOLDIERS BELOW WITH A VOLLEY OF PARALYSING FIRE.



IN A FEW TERRIBLE MOMENTS, IT WAS OVER. THE SURVIVING GERMANS CRIED SURRENDER AND CLIMBED ABOARD THE *ROMNEY ROSE* IN SULLEN SILENCE.

KEEP MOVING, FRITZ, WE'RE GONNA CLAP YOU IN IRONS!

THEN WE'LL MAKE YOU WALK THE FLIPPING PLANK, MATE!



AS THE SUN SET, THE WIND AT LAST CHANGED AND BEGAN BLOWING OFF THE ISLAND. THIS TOGETHER WITH THE CAPTURED LAUNCH, HELPED TO PUSH THE SHIP'S STERN INTO DEEPER WATER, BUT THE BOWS STILL HELD FAST. THEN BILL HAD AN IDEA...

WHAT ABOUT FLOODING NUMBER FIVE HOLD, TUFFY?

A BONNY IDEA, BILL! IT'LL WEIGH THE STERN DOWN IN THE WATER.







AND SO, IN THE FRIENDLY DARK BEFORE THE MOON ROSE, THE GALLANT OLD SHIP SET OFF TOWARDS THE EMBATTLED ISLAND.

GOSH, YOU CAN HEAR THE BATTLE FROM HERE, SKIPPER!

YES, SOUNDS AS IF IT'S IN THE HARBOUR ITSELF.

STILL DRAGGING A WEIGHTED STERN, THE *ROMNEY ROSE* STEAMED INTO THE FATEFUL LITTLE HARBOUR. . . INTO A FEARFUL SCENE OF DESTRUCTION. GUNS FLICKERED ALONG THE WATERFRONT, THE DRONE OF AIRCRAFT ENGINES WAS PUNCTUATED BY THE CRASH OF EXPLODING BOMBS AND THE LURID GLARE OF BURNING BUILDINGS DANCED ACROSS THE WATER.



THEN BILL AND HIS MEN SAW GREAT ACTIVITY ON THE DOCKSIDES. BOATS WERE FERRYING TO AND FRO BETWEEN SHIPS AND SHORE . . .

HEY, LOOK!  
OUR CHAPS ARE  
CLEARING OUT!

THAT  
DESTROYER'S  
TAKING THEM  
ABOARD!

SAM, GET THAT  
LAUNCH IN THE WATER.  
I'M GOING ASHORE  
WITH AMMUNITION.

WITH THE CAPTURED LAUNCH HASTILY FILLED WITH CASES OF AMMUNITION, BILL MADE FOR THE SHORE. BAD AS THE POSITION LOOKED BILL COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT ALL HIS EFFORTS HAD BEEN FOR NOTHING.

THEY'RE  
EVACUATING  
THE ISLAND!

THEY'RE  
DOING A  
DUNKIRK!

STAND BY!  
I'M COMING INTO  
THAT JETTY!



AN OFFICER ON THE JETTY  
PROVED TO BE A VERY  
COMPOSED MAJOR . . .



YES, WE'RE  
PULLING OUT...JERRY'S  
TOO STRONG IN THE AIR.  
THANKS FOR THE AMMO  
BUT THE PARTY'S OVER,  
I'M AFRAID.

THE MAJOR WAS GLAD TO SEE  
THE ROMNEY ROSE FOR IT  
COULD TAKE SOME OF HIS  
TROOPS. BILL SWALLOWED HIS  
DISAPPOINTMENT AND AGREED  
AT ONCE. THE FERRYING  
BEGAN . . .

OKAY,  
LADS, SOME  
OF YOU INTO  
THIS LAUNCH!



NO ONE JOKED OR EVEN SMILED. IT WAS A  
BITTER MOMENT FOR THESE SOLDIERS  
WHOSE ONLY FAULT WAS THAT THEY WERE  
TOO FEW IN NUMBERS.



## Chapter 5. FIGHTING EXIT

AMIDST A RAIN OF BOMBS AND SHELLS, THE EVACUATION OF COS WENT ON AND THE *ROMNEY ROSE* AND OTHER SHIPS BEGAN TO FILL WITH SOLDIERS.



THE MEN WERE TIRED AND DIRTY BUT CHIEFLY THEY WERE FIGHTING-MAD AT HAVING TO LEAVE THE ISLAND EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE ENEMY'S OVERWHELMING SUPERIORITY OF NUMBERS.



BILL HEARD THIS LAST REMARK WITH A FEELING OF GUILT. THE *ROMNEY ROSE* SHOULD HAVE REACHED COS TWENTY-FOUR HOURS SOONER AND ALL THAT AMMUNITION STILL LAY UNTOUCHED IN HER HOLDS. STILL THE SOLDIERS CLAMBERED OVER THE RAILS . . .

'ERE . . . LOOK AT THIS COCK-EYED OLD TUB! IT'S SINKING BEFORE WE START!



ONE OF BILL'S MEN POINTED TO A SMALL WARSHIP WHICH HAD CREPT INTO THE HARBOUR. ALREADY SOLDIERS WERE SWARMING ABOARD HER.

LOOK, SIR . . . THE CORVETTE!

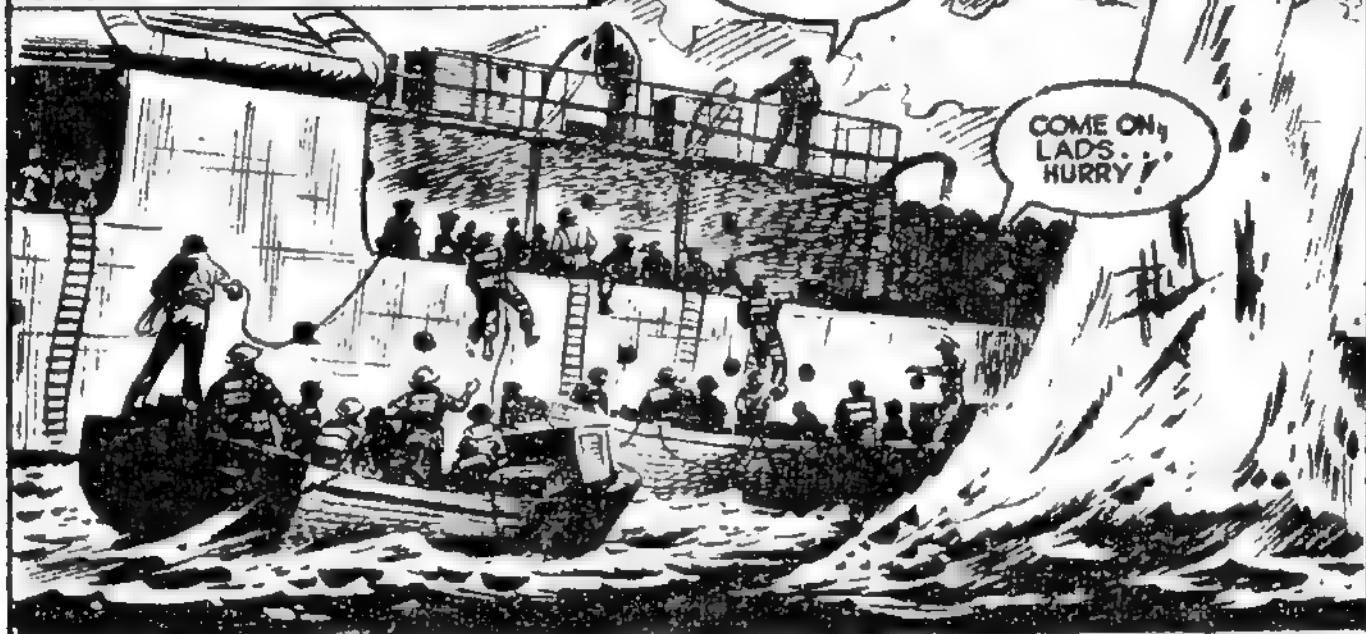
GREAT SCOTT, WHERE DID SHE SPRING FROM?



LIEUTENANT KEYNES' SHIP IT WAS...AND HE WAS HAVING A TROUBLESOME TIME GETTING THE TROOPS ABOARD SO THAT HE COULD MOVE AWAY BEFORE HE WAS SUNK. FOR BY NOW ENEMY LIGHT GUNS HAD FOUND THE CORVETTE'S RANGE.

TELL  
YOUR MEN  
TO LOOK SHARP,  
MAJOR!

COME ON,  
LADS.  
HURRY!



GERMAN BOMBERS NOW SWOOPED OUT OF THE NIGHT AND THEIR BOMBS WHISTLED DOWN AT THE SHIPS BELOW. THE HARBOUR SURFACE BEGAN TO LOOK LIKE A POND THRASHED BY NAILSTONES.



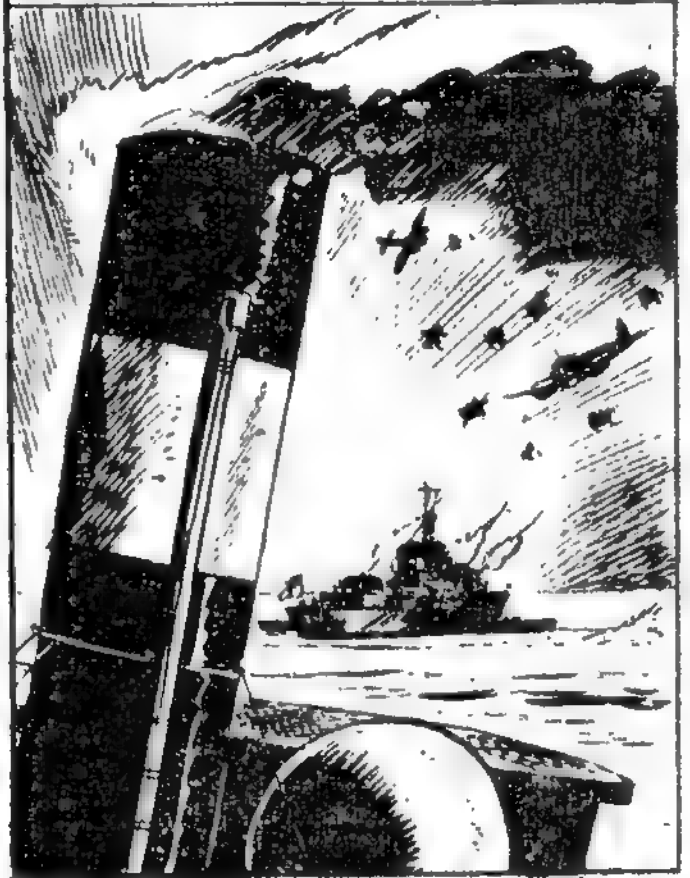


LIEUTENANT KEYNES HAD NO INTENTION OF LEAVING WITHOUT TAKING EVERY MAN HE COULD OUT OF THAT HOLOCAUST. . . BUT SPEED WAS ESSENTIAL.



HEEDLESS OF THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION HURTLING DOWN AROUND HIS SHIP, HE URGED THE SOLDIERS ABOARD AND FOR THE MOMENT HIS HUMOUR HAD DISAPPEARED. INSTEAD A HOT RAW COURAGE TOOK ITS PLACE.

BILL'S COURAGE BY CONTRAST WAS COOL AND CALCULATING. BOTH WERE FIGHTERS BUT IN DIFFERENT WAYS. AS THE *ROMNEY ROSE* APPROACHED THE CORVETTE, BILL SOUNDED HER HOARSE OLD SIREN.



HEARING THE SIREN'S INSISTENT BLAST, KEYNES WHIPPED ROUND TO STARE AND GRIN AS HE RECOGNISED THE GAME, OLD FREIGHTER.



NEXT SECOND AN ENEMY SHELL  
PLOUGHED INTO A BULKHEAD  
BELOW AND KEYNES WAS  
THROWN FLAT ON HIS BACK.



EVEN AS THE YOUNG  
COMMANDER STRUGGLED TO  
HIS FEET, A SECOND SHELL  
SLAMMED INTO THE ENGINE  
ROOM. A SAILOR BROUGHT  
HIM THE REPORT HE FEARED. . .



THE WITS WHICH HAD SO ABLY SERVED YOUNG KEYNES SWIFTLY FOUND AN ANSWER TO HIS SHIP'S PLIGHT. HE SPRANG TO A SIGNALLING LAMP AND BEGAN TO FLASH A SIGNAL TO THE BATTERED ROMNEY ROSE.



S.O.S. . . . GIVE US A TOW.

BILL'S ANSWER WAS BRIEF AND TO THE POINT. . .



STAND BY WITH HEAVING LINES.

NO MAN MORE ABLY HANDLED A LISTING CROWDED BOAT THAN DID BILL PACKER THAT FANTASTIC NIGHT. IMPERTURBED BY THE INCESSANT ENEMY SHELLING, HE CLOSED THE CORVETTE WHICH STOOD READY WITH THE TOW-LINES.



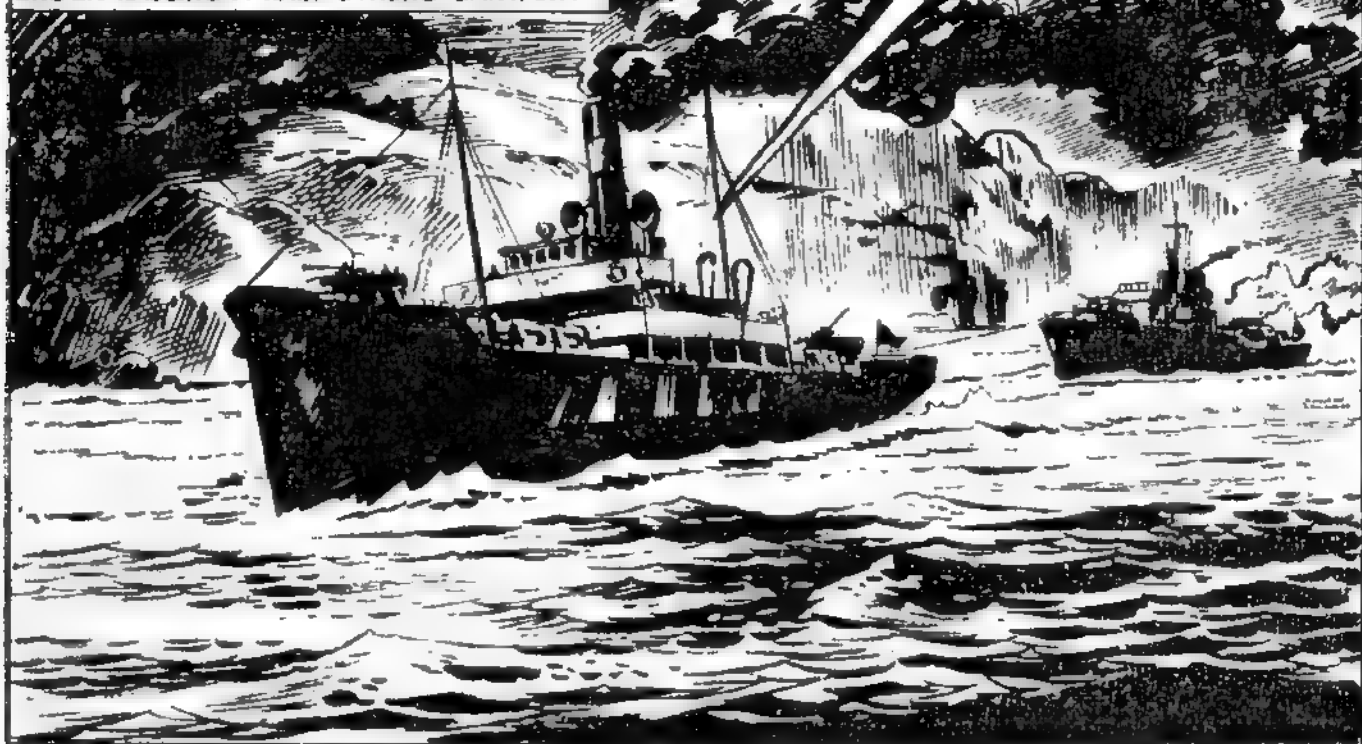
COMING UP!

OKAY, MATE!

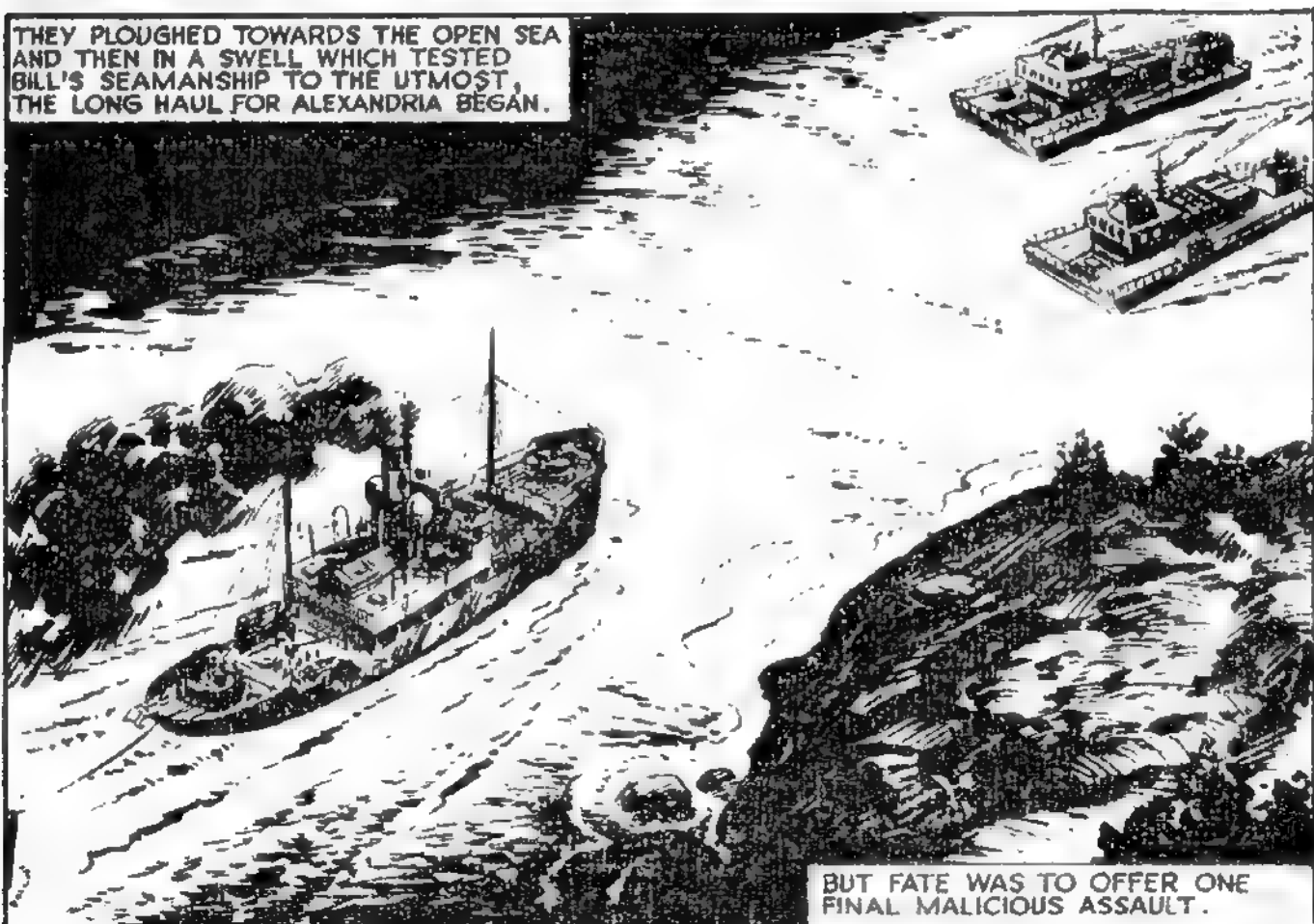


LINES WERE SOON ABOARD, FOLLOWED BY A WIRE HAWSER. THEN THEY MOVED OFF, PAINFULLY SLOW AT FIRST, BUT AT LEAST THEY WERE MOVING. AMIDST A RENEWED BARRAGE THEY FORGED ON, A TIRED OLD CROCK HAULING A HAM-STRUNG BANTAM.

THAT'S  
GRAND, TUFFY!  
KEEP IT UP!



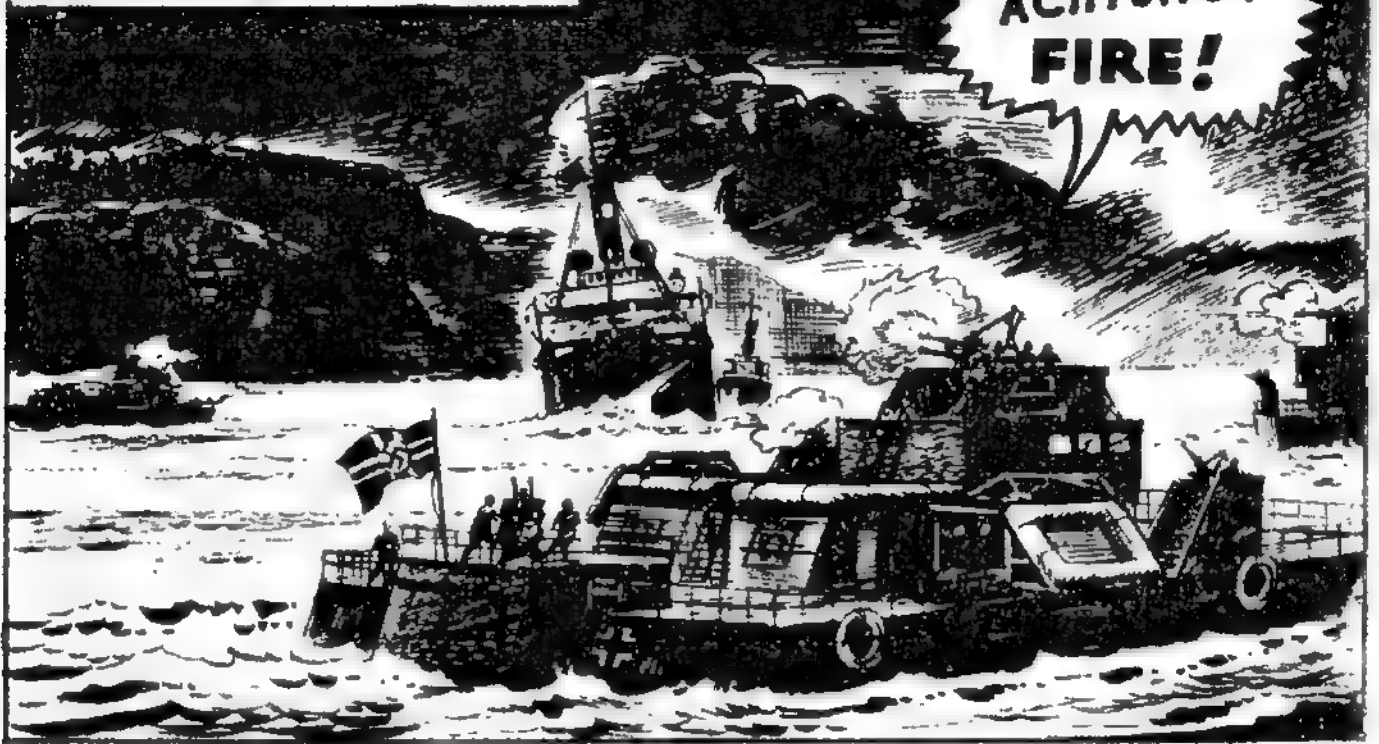
THEY PLOUGHED TOWARDS THE OPEN SEA AND THEN IN A SWELL WHICH TESTED BILL'S SEAMANSHIP TO THE UTMOST, THE LONG HAUL FOR ALEXANDRIA BEGAN.



BUT FATE WAS TO OFFER ONE  
FINAL MALICIOUS ASSAULT.

ROUNDING THE ISLAND HEADLAND THE LIMPING SHIPS FOUND A LINE OF GERMAN LANDING CRAFT CROSSING THEIR BOWS. THE GERMANS CLOSED IN ON THE ROMNEY ROSE AND FORMED A LANE OF MURDEROUS FIRE.

**ACHTUNG!  
FIRE!**



THE TROOPS ON THE ROMNEY ROSE REACTED AS IF SLAPPED IN THE FACE. THEY RUSHED TO THE RAILS AND A TORNADO OF STEEL RIPPED ACROSS THE WATER AT THE ENEMY.

YOU AIN'T  
BEATEN US!

WE'LL BE BACK  
TO GIVE YOU A  
GOOD 'IDING!



## Bomb Alley

THE BRITISH LADS KEPT IT UP UNTIL THEIR SCANTY AMMUNITION RAN OUT AND SEEING THE POSITION BILL QUICKLY OPENED UP THE HOLDS AND DEALT OUT THE AMMUNITION LYING THERE AS YET UNTOUCHED. NO LONGER WOULD HE THINK IT WASTED CARGO!



MEANWHILE THE CORVETTE FOLLOWING ASTERN BROUGHT HER OWN GUNS TO BEAR ON THE FALTERING GERMANS, NOW SHAKEN BY THE STINGING FURY OF WHAT HAD LOOKED TO BE EASY PREY. THE CROSS-FIRE FROM THE TWO BRITISH SHIPS BECAME FEARSOME.





CHEERS BROKE OUT FROM THE BRITISH RANKS. THEY HAD HAD A LAST CRACK AT THE GERMANS AND THEY FELT BETTER. LIEUTENANT KEYNES, LISTENING FROM HIS NOW USELESS BRIDGE, GRINNED IN SILENT PRAISE AT THE STEADY SLOGGING ROMNEY ROSE. THE TABLES WERE TURNED WITH A VENGEANCE.

GOOD SHOW, BILL PACKER! AND BLESS OLD AUNTIE ROSE!

HOORAY!

YIPPEE!



THE DREAD SCARPANTO STRAITS WERE REACHED AND PASSED IN SAFETY THANKS TO THICK CLOUDS THAT BLOTTED OUT THE MOON. BILL PACKER WENT AFT TO INSPECT THE TOW AND HE SAW KEYNES SHOUT SOMETHING AND WAVE HIS CLASPED HANDS ABOVE HIS HEAD IN TOKEN OF ADMIRATION.

I BET THAT CHARACTER'S SAYING SOMETHING WITTY. THERE'S NO GETTING THE NAVY DOWN WHEN THERE ARE BLOKES LIKE HIM IN IT.





FOR LONG DRAGGING HOURS THE TOW WENT ON, THE ROMNEY ROSE STILL LEANING CRAZILY, THE CORVETTE THANKFULLY FOLLOWING HER LEAD. DAYLIGHT CAME AT LENGTH AND WITH IT A SCREEN OF NAVAL VESSELS, THEIR SIRENS "WHOOOP-WHOOOPING" IN AMAZED DELIGHT.



FROM THAT DAY THERE WAS BORN A LEGEND THAT WAS TO BE TOLD AND RETOLD IN NAVAL WARD AND GUN-ROOM. WHEREVER SAILORS SIT AND YARN AND SHAKE THEIR HEADS OVER THE IMPOSSIBLE THAT NEVERTHELESS HAPPENED. . . THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF OLD AUNTIE ROSE.

Printed in England by Messrs. Percy Brothers Ltd., Manchester 1, and published each month by Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch Ltd.; South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. Kingstons Ltd. LOVE STORY LIBRARY is sold subject to the following conditions, that it shall not, without the written consent of the Publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover: and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition, or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade: or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

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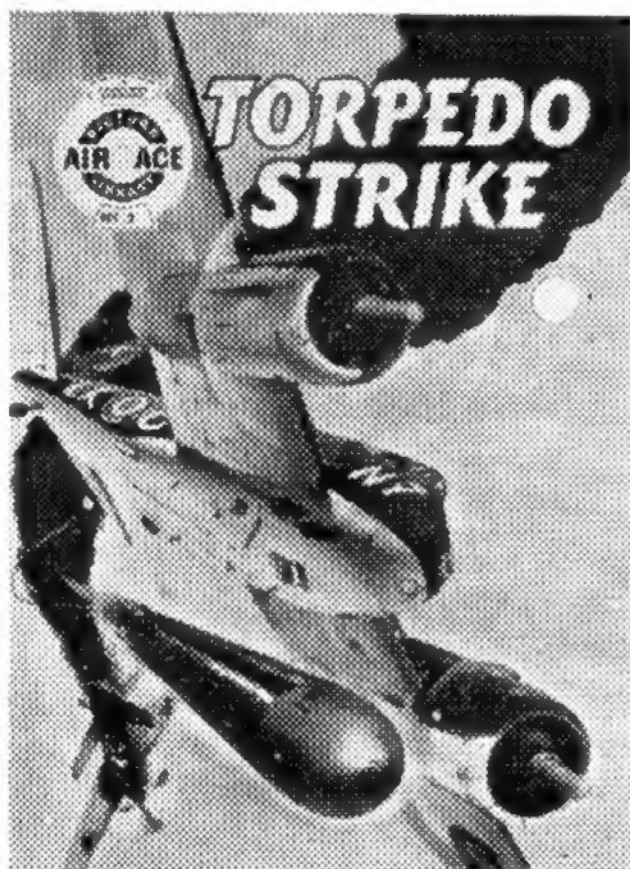
LOOK OUT! . . . THEY'RE COMING YOUR WAY!

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